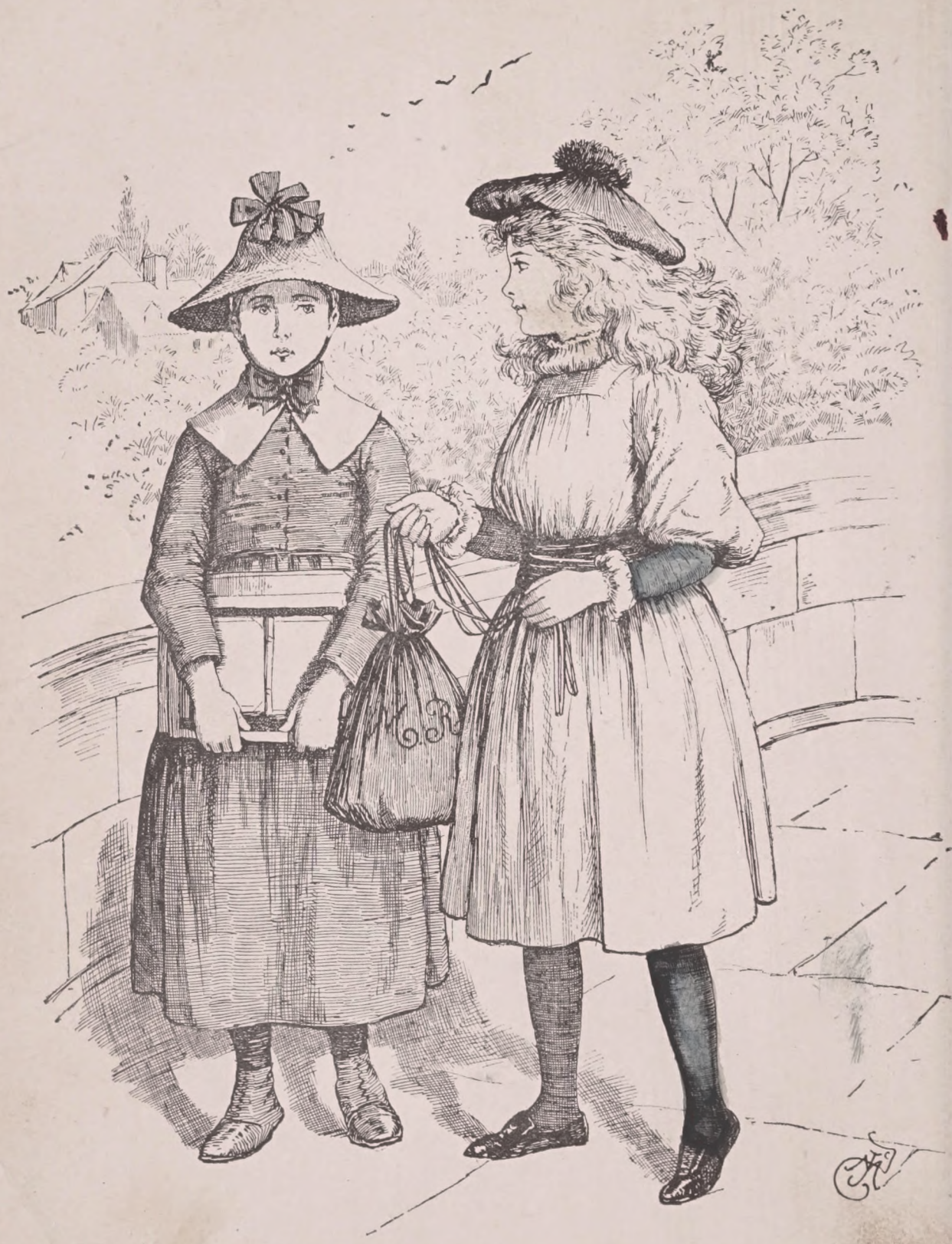
LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S SISTER



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LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S SISTER

By Penn Shirley

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LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S SISTER.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE JERUSHA.

HER name was Mary Rowe; but everybody called her "Molly," just as everybody called her sister Louise "Little Miss Weezy." She was now twelve years old, — more than twice as old as Weezy, and in her own opinion many times as wise. Many times as wise as her brother Kirke, for that matter, though the lad had reached the advanced age of ten.

Molly was a warm-hearted, quick-tempered girl, with a pink-and-white complexion, large violet eyes, and a wavy mass of tawny hair that she hated with all her might.

"I don't see why I had to be red-headed, mamma," she groaned, one morning in September, as she stood before the mirror brushing her hair for school. "Kirke's hair is almost black, and Weezy's is light, and so is baby's, — what there is of it, — and here is mine as red as a carrot!"

"Why, my silly daughter," cried Mrs. Rowe, straightening Molly's collar, "papa and I call your hair auburn."

"And isn't auburn another name for red, mamma, and don't I know it? Oh, Mamma Rowe, really and truly, sometimes I wish my hair was gray."

"Gray, Molly? It would mortify me to have it gray before your mamma's," laughed her mother, gayly. "But supposing your hair was, as you say, as red as a carrot; what great harm would there be in that? Wouldn't you prefer red hair to a crooked spine, like unfortunate Jenny Vinton's?"

"I 'm sure I don't want either," replied Molly, putting on her hat over a frown.

"Don't scowl so, Molly, my love," pleaded her mamma, smoothing away the wrinkle. "If you let trifles make you wretched, what will become of you when real troubles appear?"

"I think the real troubles appeared last Monday, mamma, when I spilled the milk in the cooking-class," said Molly, turning from the mirror with a dismal laugh. "Miss Capen looked daggers at me."

"Your carelessness might well have annoyed her; but don't cry, dearie, for last week's spilled milk; only be sure not to spill more to-day," said her mamma, with a good-by kiss. "I want you to improve in cooking this term as fast as you can. By trying, I 'm convinced you can make a skilful little housekeeper."

"My hair 'll be red all the same, mamma!"

"Nonsense, Molly! Ought n't you to care

more about becoming a useful woman than about the shade of your hair?"

Molly was tempted to say, "No, mamma," but she could not be quite so perverse. To do the child justice, it was not her habit to be morbid, and her present mood was partly due to the state of her health. She had had frequent headaches of late, and felt nervous and languid. Inez Dutton, her best friend, called her cross.

"What *is* the matter, Molly Rowe?" questioned Inez, that morning, as soon as Molly had entered the school-yard. "What can be the matter? Have you swallowed a tombstone?"

"No; Bunker Hill Monument," answered Molly, grimly.

"Oh, Molly, do tell me the trouble. Aren't you and I chums, and didn't we promise to tell each other everything?"

This could not be gainsaid, and Molly faltered, "It's our new laundress; I overheard

her this morning asking Lovisa if that 'red-headed girl' was a sister to Little Miss Weezy. Think of having Mrs. Flannigan call you 'that red-headed girl'!"

"Oh, Molly, I would n't look so woebegone if the old thing did say it. Your hair is n't *much* red."

"You would n't give me one curl of yours for it, Inez Dutton, you know you would n't!"

"Of course I should n't want to wear a wig of anybody else's hair, no matter what color it was," returned Inez, quickly changing the subject. "Oh, Molly, that makes me think about the woman who came to our house Saturday with a brown false front on, and the dowdiest bonnet!"

"Who was she?" asked Molly, with a reviving interest in life.

"Oh, it's a long yarn, Molly. I'll wait till recess."

"No, don't, Inez; tell it now, that's a jewel,"

implored Molly, linking her own arm in that of her friend.

"There's no hurry, that I know of," replied Inez, coolly, picking a splinter from her thumb with a pin; "maybe you would n't think it funny at all."

"Oh, quick, Inez, do tell it quick, before the bell rings!" cried Molly, at last aroused to what Inez considered the proper degree of curiosity.

"Well, it's about the drollest girl you ever dreamed of, Molly," began Inez, really not a whit less eager to tell than Molly was to hear. "Such a *looking* thing! Hair done up in a little bob about so big." Inez described a miniature circle with her thumb and forefinger. "And her dress! There, I don't know what you'll say when you see it! Skirt most down to her toes, and cut so queer!"

"Why, Inez, just now you said the story was about an old woman with a false front!"

"Oh, yes, it's about her too; she's the grandmother,—'grandmarm' the little girl calls her. They came to our house to see papa. She's hired papa's little yellow cottage, down behind the Common,—the 'grandmarm' has. They're from the country; you'd think so!" And Inez laughed so heartily that she nearly toppled Molly over.

"How old is this little girl?" asked Molly, laughing herself to see Inez laugh.

"Oh, about as old as we are; but she isn't so large. And if you'll believe it, Molly Rowe, the poor thing's name is Jerusha,—Jerusha Runnell!"

"Jerusha Runnell! What a name! I do hope she doesn't mind."

"Maybe she's got used to her name as she has to her funny words. She talks like an old woman about ninety. Her grandma told me 'Jerushy had never had any little mates, and she'd be pleased to have me come and visit

with Jerushy.' I would n't 'visit with her' for anything, though. All the time they stayed I was in torment for fear the grandmother would ask me to bring Jerusha with me to school. She says she 's moved to Gallatin 'a purpose to give her granddarter some schoolin'.'"

"Oh dear, there 's the bell!" said Molly, running up the steps.

"I must have a drink of water before I go in," cried Inez, lingering.

Molly was already seated in the schoolroom when pretty Inez fluttered up the aisle in her new muslin dress, so ruffled and fluted and frilled that she seemed to be skimming along on wings, like a great butterfly.

"Oh, Molly," panted she, stopping at Molly's desk, "that Jerusha Runnell *is* coming to school! She tried to tag me upstairs, but I ran as fast as I could run!"

"Is she all sole alone?" whispered Molly, giving Inez' hand a loving little squeeze.

"Yes. I'm sorry for her, of course; but what *could* I do? S'pose I was going to walk into school with the outlandish creature, and have the girls all think she was one of my relations?"

"I hear her clumping up the stairs," whispered Molly, gazing intently into the hall.

"Hear her! you can't help hearing her, unless you have ears like a stone jar," said Inez, scornfully. "She wears calfskin shoes, tied with leather shoe-strings. Hark! she's tiptoeing now along the upper hall. Look, look, Molly! she's in the doorway."

Molly nearly laughed outright, as her eyes rested upon the "outlandish creature," in a bright purple dress, with a wide turned-over collar almost large enough for a cape.

"Oh, Inez, Inez, it's too perfectly comical!" cried she. "The little thing looks just like a grandmother cut down!"

"Is she coming in, or is she not?" whispered Inez, fluttering on up the aisle.

In doubt what to do, the timid little waif was advancing and retreating across the threshold with the wavering motion of a toy balloon tied to a rubber cord, when fortunately she was spied by Miss True, the teacher, and called to the desk.

Having registered the child's name, Miss True proceeded to question her about her parents.

"I have n't any father and mother, marm; I 'most the same as never had any," replied little Jerusha, seriously.

Miss True bit her lips.

"They 've been dead going on ten years," continued her confiding young pupil. "My grandmarm brings me up. Grandmarm and I have always lived alone together, up at Shy Corner, back on a cross road; but I could n't have school privileges there."

"You know how to read, I suppose," remarked Miss True, absently, querying where to seat the child.

"Grandmarm taught me to read long ago," answered little Jerusha, looking grieved. "I read aloud in the Bible every night."

"I am glad to know that, my dear," said the teacher, smiling down upon the demure young maiden; and then she sent her to sit with Inez Dutton.

This was anything but agreeable to Inez.

"What did Miss True put that little image with me for, Molly?" said she tartly, at recess. "I think it was shabby."

"Hush, hush, Inez; Jerusha 'll hear you," cried Molly, with a warning glance toward the quaint little stranger, alone in a corner of the yard.

"Well, let her hear! Let her hear all I say if she wants to, and then go back to the Ark and tell it to Mrs. Noah and the rest of 'em!"

"Don't, Inez,—don't make me laugh. No, no, you must n't! Jerusha knows we 're talking about her, and she 's ready to cry!" exclaimed Molly, walking slowly forward with her eyes upon the ground. "Don't look at her! Come, let 's be hunting for pins."

"H—m! it 's easy enough for you to pity that little Mother Hubbard," snarled Inez, following ungraciously. "If I were you, I 'd pity me too!"

"You've made a rhyme that 's worth a dime," laughed Molly, "and I do pity you too; I most certainly do." But on seeing little Jerusha slyly wiping her eyes upon her sleeve, she exclaimed in an altered tone, "My mamma says we must always be polite to the new scholars, Inez. Let 's speak to that little girl. Come!"

"Sha' n't do any such thing."

"Then I 'm going alone. It 's a shame to treat her so!" said Molly, hotly.

"As you please, Molly Rowe. I can walk with Mary Grigg."

Ruffled in more senses than one, Inez fluttered away, while Molly, trying her best to think of something to talk about, joined Jerusha.

"Do you suppose you'll like coming to school?" she began rather timidly.

"I don't like it yet, and I'm afraid I sha'n't like it ever," replied Jerusha, nervously fingering the string of old-fashioned gold beads that she wore at her neck.

"Oh, I hope you will," said Molly, kindly. "Don't you think our schoolhouse is pretty?"

"Yes, indeed! it's terrible pretty," returned Jerusha, making little wells in the ground with the toe of her shoe. "It scares me, it's so bran-fire new, and fixy."

"It was new this fall; and we have the dearest kitchen in it, with a cooking-range, and a soapstone sink, and plenty of cherry dressers, and everything," continued Molly proudly, as if the building were her own.

"A kitchen in school? Oh, I guess you must

be joking," responded little Jerusha, all at once suspicious that the city girl was making game of her.

"No, no; truly, I'm not joking," cried Molly. "We have a lovely kitchen upstairs."

"Well, if that does n't beat all! What do you have a kitchen in school for?"

"Why, to learn to cook. We cook one hour every week. We have lessons in cooking the same as we have lessons in arithmetic."

"You do? Oh, I should like that!" cried Jerusha with sudden animation.

"Can you cook anything?" asked Molly, gratified at her success in making conversation.

"I should smile if I could n't," answered Jerusha, with a gay little laugh. "Why, when grandmarm was laid up with the rheumatiz a year ago come harvesting, I cooked all the victuals."

"Then you 're ahead of me. I 've only got to steamed puddings," said Molly, humbly. "To-

day, though, we're going to begin on griddle-cakes and cream-of-tartar biscuits. Our class comes this afternoon, right after recess, and you'll be in it."

"I shall be in your class? Oh, I'm proper glad."

Molly could not say truthfully, "So am I," but she tried to conceal her lack of cordiality by hastily remarking: "Hattie Fell has moved to Boston, and I think you'll be put in Hattie's place at my table. She used to sit where you do in school."

CHAPTER II.

MOLLY COOKING.

"I'm glad you spoke to the lonesome little stranger, Molly," said Mrs. Rowe at dinner-time, after listening to her daughter's graphic description of Jerusha Runnell. "I hope you'll take pains to make her happy."

"But I hate to be seen talking with her, mamma; the girls laugh at me."

"Oh, Molly, you should have more sense than to heed their thoughtlessness. Set them the example of being kind to Jerusha, and I believe they'll follow it."

"But you don't know how hard it is to think of anything to say to her, mamma," persisted Molly. "She acts as if she'd never seen anybody; she's a real, little-girl Robinson Crusoe."

"Those odd ways come from her having always lived with old people, Molly. Now she can have companions of her own age I dare say she will soon seem more like other girls," said Mrs. Rowe, as her little daughter left her. "From what you say, I judge Jerusha must be a good child; and I want you to remember to treat her kindly."

That afternoon Molly could not help seeing that the little new-comer felt very ill at ease in the fine modern schoolroom, with its high walls and shining maps and brass-mounted globes. Twice before recess she met the child's grave gray eyes fixed upon herself with an expression that made her sorry.

"The poor thing is so homesick she's most dead," thought she, pityingly. "I wish some of the other girls would do something to cheer her. Seems to me I've done my part!"

All through the spelling-lesson Molly reasoned with herself in this fashion; then her

better nature conquered, and she resolved to act toward Jerusha as her mother had desired.

So when the cooking-class had been called, and the twelve girls were filing up the staircase, she smiled back at Jerusha to show her good-will, and on the landing paused to whisper, "Don't you want to borrow one of my cooking aprons to-day, Jerusha? I have two."

"Yes, I should be pleased to," answered Jerusha, gratefully. And the girls passed on together into a sunny room with tinted ceiling, and a hard-wood floor laid with narrow boards of contrasting colors.

At a table near the door sat a pleasant black-eyed lady, in a white cap and apron, to whom Molly bowed respectfully, and said, "Good-afternoon, Miss Capen."

"I thought we were going into the kitchen," whispered Jerusha, shrinking backward.

"Why, we *are* in the kitchen, Jerusha. *This*

is the kitchen; don't you see the stove and the baking-tables?" asked Molly, in surprise. "These are the dressers I told you about. The cans of spices and things are on the upper shelves behind the curtains."

"My stars! You have got things fixed up handsome!" whispered Jerusha, admiringly, thinking to herself, "The kitchen is enough sight better'n grandmarm's parlor at Shy Corner, but I've no call to say it."

Meanwhile the rest of the class were putting on their caps and aprons, and taking their seats at the baking-tables, each one of which would accommodate four girls.

"Now I wish I had a cap for you," said Molly, as she tied the promised apron over Jerusha's peculiar dress. "Is your handkerchief clean? Oh, yes, it's clean as a new penny. Let me pin it about your head like a turban. There, that will do nicely."

"I'm much obleeged, I'm sure; but don't I

look kind of queer in this rig?" asked Jerusha, dubiously, as if she had not previously looked as queer as she could.

"Oh, it's all right," returned Molly, smiling. "And now we'll hurry to tell your name to Miss Capen," added she, drawing Jerusha toward the teacher's chair. "She'll want it before she calls the roll."

As Molly had expected, Miss Capen directed her to take Jerusha to her own table.

"Mary Grigg and Grace Allen sit on one side of it, Jerusha, and you and I on the other," explained Molly, giving the bashful new cook a chair. "There, isn't this cosey? The stove in front of you is for us, and the other one is for Grace and Mary."

"What cunning little concerns! But ain't it considerable hard to kindle a fire in 'em?" asked Jerusha, pleased and interested till she caught a smile on the countenances of the girls opposite that made her very uncomfortable.

Could it be that they were laughing at herself?

"Oh, these are gas stoves; we light them with a match," said Molly, hiding her face from Jerusha.

"And here on the shelf under the table are the cooking things," she added, stealthily shaking her head at the giggling girls. "See, I have a little cake-board, and rolling-pin, and mixing-bowl, and knives, and spoons, and I don't know what all. And you have just the same."

Little Jerusha pretended to examine the articles mentioned, though she was thinking all the while, "What can those girls be snickering at! I wonder if it's that pocket-handkercher. If it's that, I don't care."

Here Miss Capen tapped the table with her lead pencil.

"Now, girls, I hope you've cooked a great many nice things at home this week," said she, briskly. "Give me a list of them, please, as I

read your names. We'll begin with Grace Allen. Grace, what have you cooked?"

"Mashed potatoes once, baked potatoes once, suet pudding twice," answered Grace, rising.

"Oh, fie! Is that the end? Inez Dutton, I hope your list will be longer."

Inez had cooked thirteen articles, Blanche Fisher only two, Mary Grigg fifteen. And so it went on down to Molly Rowe, who notwithstanding occasional headaches during the interval had made in all twenty-six articles of food.

"Well done, Molly, I'm proud of you!" cried Miss Capen, so cordially that it made Molly happy all day.

Following Molly's name came Jerusha Runnell's, the last on the roll.

"Can you cook at all, Jerusha?" asked Miss Capen, glancing curiously toward her new pupil.

"I can cook tolerable well," said little Je-

rusha modestly, standing in answering, as she had seen the other girls do.

"Ah, can you? Please mention some of the things you 've made, Jerusha."

This was an opportunity that the self-respecting little rustic felt should not be neglected. Repeatedly that day she had been chagrined at finding herself unable to perform tasks easy to her comrades. But if she could not like them make shapely figures in ciphering, or correct maps upon the blackboard, she at least could cook many things that they had not attempted; and it was only fair that they should know it.

"Oh, I 've made Indian bannocks, and spider-cakes, and nutcakes," she began, twisting her thumbs and swaying backward and forward; "and egg pies, and hog's-head cheese, and bean porridge, and — and — other things;" she ended in confusion, sitting down dismayed at the suppressed tittering in the class.

"Oh, Molly, what have I said now? Do tell me what it is that tickles 'em so," whispered she, sadly convinced that it must be something more than the "pocket-handkercher."

"Oh, 't is nothing, — nothing to feel bad about, I mean," said Molly, laughing because she must. "It 's only the funny things you cook at your house, Jerusha. We 'd never heard of half of 'em."

"Jerusha must have been well taught," Miss Capen made haste to say. "And now, girls, we must get to work. Molly Rowe, yours was the longest list to-day. You shall be housekeeper number one. What must you do first?"

"Polish the stove, light the fire, and clean the oilcloth," answered Molly, bringing the blacking-brush; while housekeepers numbers two and three set about washing the dishes and sweeping and dusting the kitchen.

The remaining girls scrubbed their hands,

rolled up their sleeves, and proceeded to make griddle-cakes. Miss Capen contrived to keep them all employed. Inez Dutton sifted the flour; Mary Grigg measured the baking powder; Jenny Vinton added the milk; and after the batter had been thoroughly beaten, Grace Allen lighted the little gas-stoves, and heated the French frying-pans. Next, Jerusha Runnell buttered one of these pans, and Inez Dutton dropped the batter into it in spoonfuls, which instead of falling in three separate places as desired, perversely scattered over a dozen.

"What a host of 'em!" whispered Molly, passing the table as the cakes were beginning to bake. "They look like little islands in the grease."

"That's what they are; they're the Isles of Greece," retorted Inez gayly; which sent Molly back to her cooking-range smilingly confirmed in the opinion that Inez was "just too bright for anything."

But presently these small "Isles of Greece" spread, and united into one large one, which gave Inez much annoyance. In vain she slipped her knife under its brown edges as she had been bidden; in vain she pried it up carefully with a spatula; she could not turn it over without breaking it. The result was that she grew hot, and the cake grew hotter, till it finally burned in the middle and had to be thrown away.

This failure irritated Inez very much; and the fact that Jerusha immediately afterwards baked three cakes nicely on the same frying-pan irritated her yet more. She said to herself that she did not choose to be outdone by a "little fright from Shy Corner;" and notwithstanding she was presently allowed to butter and sugar the cakes as fast as the girls prepared them, Inez could not recover her spirits.

In baking the biscuits made by the class

later, Molly Rowe succeeded beyond her wildest hopes. She scorched her finger against the coal range in the process; but she would have preferred to scorch her whole hand rather than the biscuits, for she had set her heart on astonishing her mamma by becoming a famous cook.

After the fires had been extinguished, the dishes washed, and the tables scoured, then came the fun of the lesson, — a tiny lunch of hot biscuits and griddle-cakes.

"I think it's almost as good as a picnic, Jerusha; don't you?" whispered Molly, gratified to see the little girl's happier look.

"Yes, I do; pretty nigh," answered the child, heartily; "and I think your biscuits eat well."

"Thank you," said Molly, with an amused smile, that vanished before the frown on Inez' face. It always disquieted Molly to see her friend out of humor.

CHAPTER III.

THE WHITE DRESS.

"WHO says I'm mad with you, Inez Dutton? It's a fib, whoever says it!" cried Molly, a few mornings later, standing her geography endwise upon her desk to prop her aching head upon it. "I'm not mad with you now, but I shall be mad with you if you don't stop talking so about my going with Jerusha Runnell. And you need n't think I go with her all for fun, either."

At this point, finding her troublesome temper fast running away with her, Molly suddenly paused, and held her breath.

"Anybody'd suppose you'd be ashamed to be seen in the street with her," said Inez, spitefully.

Being the prettiest girl in school, and one of the brightest, and a born leader besides, she had always queened it over her companions, — Molly Rowe, her dearest friend, included. She wanted Molly all to herself, and had no intention of sharing her with that little "grandmother cut down."

"I do hate to meet people," admitted Molly candidly; "but as long as Jerusha and I go home the same way, and she is n't acquainted with many girls, mamma says 't would be downright unkind for me to steal away from the little thing."

"Oh, before I 'd be so goody goody, Molly Rowe!"

"Do you call it goody goody to mind your mother, Inez Dutton?" blazed Molly. "I 'm not pretending to be extra good, and you know it."

"No, no, Molly; I did n't say you were pretending anything," returned Inez, so well satisfied with the stab she had given, that she was

willing to make peace. "And I'm sure it's lovely of you to take such care of that ugly little bundle of purple calico which nobody claims. I'm sure she does n't belong to our set."

"Jerusha is nicer than you'd suppose, though," insisted Molly, her anger cooling.

"Yes, and so is cabbage," laughed Inez; "but I should n't think you'd want either of them every day in the week. I don't see you hardly at all, lately, Molly," she went on rather peevishly, resting her head on the atlas beside Molly's. "What does Jerusha have to say?"

"I believe I do the most of the talking. Oh, I've told her of the Reading-room, and how we are to furnish it for the boys before Christmas. But I have n't lisped any of our secrets, Inez," added Molly, adroitly, "and I would n't have done it, not if Jerusha had pinched me black and blue."

"Oh, no, I know you would n't breathe our secrets to anybody. I know you'd never do

that," responded Inez, looking as complacent as if these trifling confidences between herself and Molly involved the fate of nations; "but I hate to have you chat with Jerusha, anyway, she's so common."

"I rather think you and I would want girls to be kind to us, Inez Dutton, if our fathers had lost their legs in the army, and suffered afterwards years and years till they died!" cried Molly, again aroused.

Inez sat bolt upright, with an expression of horror. "Oh, misery, Molly Rowe! was that looking thing's father a soldier in the army?" groaned she, too engrossed to criticise Molly's absurd remark. "If her father was a soldier, she'll march Anniversary Day with the Daughters of the Veterans. She will! she'll march with us as true as preaching! She'll spoil our part of the procession."

Jerusha's champion dropped the atlas, and sat bolt upright in her turn.

"Oh, Inez Dutton, I never thought of that," cried she in an agonized tone, — "I never once thought of it!"

The two girls had been looking forward with keen delight to this day, when the city of Gallatin would celebrate its one hundredth birthday. There were to be flags, and flowers, and speeches, and bands of music, and a grand parade; and — best of all to Molly and Inez — they, as soldiers' daughters, could take a prominent part in this parade. They were proud of the anticipated honor, and they and the other soldiers' daughters in school had agreed to dress in white, that they might adorn the procession. And now to think of the Daughters of the Veterans being made a laughing-stock by this eccentric little maiden from Shy Corner! It was beyond endurance.

"Maybe we could put Jerusha in the middle, out of sight," suggested Molly presently, striving to look on the bright side.

"We could n't put her where she would n't be noticed, Molly Rowe; you know we could n't," returned Inez with sad decision. "That stringy purple skirt of hers flops about like a pillow-case on a clothes-line; and then that ridiculous collar!"

"Seems to me she must have another dress for Sunday, Inez. Who ever heard of a girl with only one dress?"

"If she had as many gowns as Queen Elizabeth used to have, they'd all be sure to be made in that old-fashioned way," said Inez dejectedly. "I should n't care quite so much how our procession looked if Cousin Matilda was n't coming from Boston. She's awfully stylish; and *won't* she think Gallatin is backwoodsy when she sees Jerusha? *Won't* she, though? Oh, it makes me so mad!"

"Jerusha does n't bob her hair up any more; that's one good thing," observed Molly, twisting Inez' prettiest curl. "I begged her not to."

"I do wonder if she has a white dress," continued Inez reflectively. "I'd give her my old cross-barred muslin if mamma'd let me; I hate the old thing."

"Would n't it be a mile too big for her, Inez?"

"As to that, her own is two miles too big," said Inez, laughing. "My dress could n't fit her so shockingly as that one does, not if it should try; and how much better my dress would look in the procession!"

"Yes, any amount better."

"I'll tease mamma to let Jerusha have it, would n't you, Molly? It hunches my shoulders all up," said Inez, hastening away at the tap of the bell.

As it proved, Mrs. Dutton was perfectly willing that Inez should do what she pleased with the cross-barred muslin. Next came the question of presenting it to Jerusha.

"I think you're the one to speak to her, you

know her so much better than I," urged Inez the following morning.

Molly demurred.

"I don't like to; you see it is n't as if she and her grandma were up-and-down poor people," said she, treating Inez to a sugar gooseberry. "Last night when I went in with Jerusha for a drink of water their supper was ready, and I saw pie and preserves on the table. They have a pension; Jerusha told me so."

"Wish they 'd spend it for clothes," commented Inez, as distinctly as the gooseberry in her mouth would permit.

"And Mrs. Runnell was packing up a big bundle, Inez, for a family at Shy Corner who have been burned out lately."

"Well, if she sends off her 'granddarter's' old gowns, Jerusha 'll need that white one of mine more 'n ever. You give it to her, Molly. Come, that 's a dear."

"Oh, Inez, I can't; I should n't know what to say."

"Neither should I."

"I 'm so afraid it would hurt her feelings, Inez."

"Yes, Molly, there it is! And if she wears her own gown she 'll hurt *our* feelings," returned Inez, jocosely. "What will become of our procession if somebody does n't dress Jerusha?"

After repeated discussions during the day the two girls at close of school decided the affair by lot, Inez holding the straws — two broom-straws of unequal length — and Molly drawing. The lot fell on Molly.

"Oh, dear me!" groaned Molly, with a wry face; "where is the little country girl?"

"Ahead there. If you run you can catch her. Oh, you are the best girl, Molly," cried Inez, as Molly darted away, shouting, "Jerusha, Jerusha, wait for me!"

The little neglected stranger paused, delighted, till Molly joined her.

"Jerusha is a very, very long name to call," panted her pursuer, beginning far from her errand. "Supposing I should call you Jessie? Don't you think Jessie is a sweet name?"

"Yes, real sweet; only it does n't belong to me, you know," said the honest, straightforward little lassie, as the girls walked on together. "I don't want any name that does n't belong to me."

"Oh, oh! what a little old woman! If she feels this way about just a name, what will she say about the dress?" soliloquized Molly, discouraged at the outset. But true to her agreement with Inez, she told Jerusha of the coming festival, and that all the soldiers' daughters had been requested to march in the procession dressed in white.

Jerusha seemed deeply interested.

"That 'll be proper nice," she said, as she

re-tied her sunburnt hat, that reminded Molly of a rusty wash-dish turned upside down.

"And Inez Dutton and I thought," went on Molly, nervously swinging her school-bag, —"we thought, as you could n't have heard of the parade before you came, you know, that maybe you might n't have a white dress to wear."

Jerusha was looking up at her in a wondering way that made it hard for Molly to proceed.

"And Inez said if you did happen not to have a white dress, you could — you could have — I mean she could — could give you one of hers as well as not," stammered Molly, growing redder and redder.

"Why, I 've got a white dress of my own, Molly! What made you and Inez think I had n't?" asked Jerusha, bluntly.

"Inez' dress would look ever so nice on you," said Molly, evading the question, and

using all the tact at her command. "Inez always has a great many beautiful clothes, and she does n't need that dress."

"Then she 'd better give it to somebody that does," replied Jerusha, not angrily, but as if stating a fact. "Does n't she have any folks in her neighborhood that are put to it to get along?"

"Oh Jerusha, you don't understand. Inez would n't give that dress to a beggar-girl. It 's too pretty," cried Molly, in a last effort to maintain the credit of the procession. "She wants you to march in it. We think it would be lovely for you."

"But I 've got a dress of my own, you see, and it 's middlin' good. 'T was bran-new two years ago come next Independence Day," persisted Jerusha, with quiet decision. "You can tell Inez Dutton I 'm obleeged to her, but I know grandmarm would n't be willing for me to wear other folks' clothes."

Molly walked on in silence, as embarrassed as if she had presumed to offer peanuts to Queen Victoria. When she spoke again, it was about Grandpa Rowe. She told Jerusha that he was coming to Gallatin to make a speech on Centennial Day.

CHAPTER IV.

A GALA DAY.

ON Anniversary Day the sun rose bright and joyous, which is more than could be said of our Molly. She came down to breakfast so pale and languid that Grandpa Rowe, just arrived by the early train, regarded her anxiously, and asked what had become of her red cheeks.

"Molly has n't seemed like herself since the fair," observed Mrs. Rowe, as she poured the coffee.

"This 'll never do, Mary; we can't have Molly ill," said grandpa, tucking his napkin under his chin. "Let me take her home with me, won't you?"

"Oh, mamma, may I go to Drummond?" cried Molly eagerly.

"I suspect the child needs country air and her grandma's nursing," continued Grandpa Rowe.

"Wish I needed it too," murmured hardy Kirke. "Don't you think I need it, grandpa?"

"Me too, grandpa?" echoed plump little Weezy.

"Hush, hush! my dears," said their mother, smiling. "What could grandma do with you all? And what could papa and I do without you?"

"I'd fill Mrs. Filura's wood-box, and hunt hens' nests for Mr. John," pleaded Kirke.

"No, no, my little son. While you are so very, very well you must n't leave school," said Mrs. Rowe, still smiling. "But with Molly it is different; she is ill, and needs a change."

"Hoh, mamma, I think Molly looks well,— just as well as she can look!" muttered Kirke churlishly, vexed for the moment because he himself was not ailing enough to be sent away for his health.

"Of course you 'll want to hear your grandpa speak at Lincoln Park, Molly," said her mamma, choosing not to notice Kirke's ungracious words; "but you need n't go to the Common to join the procession."

"Oh, mamma, don't say it! I would n't *not* march for anything," cried Molly, as they rose from the table.

"I 'm afraid this hot sun will make your head ache," replied her mother, passing her arm across Molly's shoulder, and walking with her out upon the porch.

"Oh no, mamma; it won't ache. Besides, I don't care if it does," cried Molly, her cheeks now so flushed that if Grandpa Rowe could have seen them then he might have thought as Kirke did, that she "looked just as well as she could look."

But Grandpa Rowe was pacing the gravel-walk, with his hands behind him and his eyes upon the ground, thinking of the address he

was presently to deliver, and not at all of Molly.

"Remember it is a warm day for the last of September, Molly; and the procession will be tiresome."

"Oh, mamma, Inez will be in it, — I promised to march with her; and there 'll be Jerusha, — I 'm on tiptoe to see her white dress, — and there 'll be all the other girls. Oh, you don't know how I should hate to be left out."

Mrs. Rowe thought she did know very well; and feeling that it might harm Molly less to march than to stay at home to grieve, she said, as she went into the house, —

"Well, dear, if your head does n't ache I 'm willing that you should march. You need do nothing at home this morning, excepting to feed your bird and see that Weezy goes away tidy."

"Don't I look fit enough, Molly?" asked Weezy, from the porch steps, where she and

her little friend Kisty Nye sat playing "which shall get married first?" "My dress is spandy clean."

"Don't stain it," said Molly, leaning against the rail to watch the children.

Each held a stalk of grass upside down in one hand, squeezing it solemnly between the thumb and forefinger of the other.

"I 've squoze the biggest drop, Kisty. I 'most know I shall get married first," cried Weezy joyfully, watching the swelling sphere at the end of her stalk, as a cat might watch a squirrel on a stump.

"My drop is bigger 'n 't was. See, is n't it a whopper?" returned Kisty, displaying her own stalk crowned by a greenish bead.

"Yes, Kisty; so it is. Now let 's touch 'em together," cried Weezy, fairly trembling with eagerness. "One, two —"

At this critical moment heedless Molly, absorbed in her own thoughts, chanced to jostle

her little sister's arm, and the two drops went rolling into one upon Kisty's stalk.

Weezy sprang up highly offended.

"You hush making me not get married first, Molly Rowe!" cried she, stamping her foot. "It is n't fair. I 'll tell mamma."

"Oh, I did n't mean to touch you, Weezy. Do forgive me," said Molly, arousing from her reverie. Ought she, or ought she not, to tell her mamma that her head ached a little? Ought she to march when her mamma did not quite approve?

"You made me not get married first, when I 'd squoze the biggest drop, too!" wailed Weezy, only half pacified.

"Can't you try again?"

"No, I 'm tired of getting married first. It hurts my finger-nails. Tell us something else to play, Molly."

"Oh, play tableaux."

"What is tableaux, Molly?" asked Kisty,

who was a little girl that talked little and thought a great deal.

"Tableaux? Why, Kisty, don't you remember we had them at our fair?" said Molly, carrying off the bird-cage. "They are pictures with people in them. A tableau is a picture that's alive."

"Hoh, Kisty, Molly means a photograb," said Weezy with disdain. "I've been those lots of times, where the man sticks your head into a pie-fork, you know, and tells you to look pleasant."

"Oh, yes, and peeks at you from behind a clothes-horse, to see if you mind," said Kisty. "Yes, I've been those too; but I don't want to play 'em. Isn't it 'most time to start?"

"Have you an engagement, my children?" asked Grandpa Rowe, pausing at the end of the walk.

"Oh, no, grandpa," replied Weezy, promptly,

"Kisty and me have got to go to the Common at ten o'clock, that's all."

"Ah, yes, I recall it now," said Grandpa Rowe, moving on with an amused smile. "Kirke must be proud to escort two nice little girls like yourselves."

"What *is* 'scort'?" whispered puzzled Kisty.

"I don't know," returned Weezy, proud of a grandfather so learned. "My grandpa knows heaps of words like that. He's a preacher, and he preaches."

Crushed at first, Kisty rallied enough to say, "Well, my grandpa knows lots of hard words too, Weezy Rowe. My grandpa is a lawyer, and he laws."

"Anyway, my Grandpa Rowe wears a white necktie every single day, when it is n't a party either, Kisty Nye," retorted Weezy, watching Kirke advancing toward the gate on his new bicycle.

"I don't care if your Grandpa Rowe does

wear a white necktie. He does n't carry a bag, does he? My Grandpa Morrill carries a bag, — a great long green bag, with papers in."

"Hoh, that's nothing! My grandpa keeps his sermons in a barrel, Kisty Nye, — a big, round, splintery barrel, with hoops on!"

"Anyway, Weezy Rowe, I don't believe your grandfather goes to court!" cried Kisty, with a quivering lip. "My grandpa — "

"Quick, midgets, get on your hats. They're forming the procession," shouted Kirke, leaping from his wheel at this opportune moment.

"Come and let me brush your hair before you go, Weezy," cried Molly, hurrying back with the cage. "Kisty, I must get the grass-stains off your fingers."

Weezy hopped up, and Kisty hopped down; for a short time all was bustle and confusion, but when Molly at last had made the little girls clean and tidy, they frisked away behind Kirke, hand in hand, their petty quarrel forgotten.

CHAPTER V.

DRUMS AND FIFES.

THE procession was to start from the Common, and thence proceed to Lincoln Park, where a broad platform had been built for the speakers.

When Molly, breathless, arrived at the Common, the children of the public schools were being arranged in lines, two by two, each school with a banner of its own. But Molly was not to march with the scholars to-day, — oh no, not she! She was to march in advance, with the Daughters of the Veterans, and she and Inez Dutton were to carry the flag. She felt this to be a great honor, and in passing forward to her place tried not to look too proud. Inez, far in front, kept turning around and wildly beckoning.

"Oh, I was so scared for fear you would n't be here in season!" she cried, the instant Molly reached her.

"I could n't hurry any faster," said Molly, "my head aches so."

"Does it ache? Oh, what a pity! But I 've saved you the place. I was bound Jerusha Runnell should n't stick herself in!"

"Come, Inez, that is n't fair. Jerusha would n't have stuck herself into my place, you know that very well," cried Molly, bridling. She would not have chosen this grotesque little maid from Shy Corner as her bosom friend; nevertheless, she wanted justice done her. "Besides," added Molly, with a laughing attempt to conquer her ill temper, "Jerusha does n't want anything that does n't belong to her, — not even a name!"

"I should, if my name was Jerusha Runnell," retorted Inez, viciously, a little piqued that the child had refused to accept the dress.

"Where is Jerusha? Does she look like a fright?" asked Molly suddenly, knitting her brows as the band struck up a march.

"Why no! she looks almost like white folks," admitted Inez, with a sigh of relief, as the procession moved forward. "She has on that 'middlin' good' white dress she told you about. It is n't half so pretty as my cross-barred muslin, but it 'll do."

"Yes, indeed it will. Your Cousin Matilda will never notice her in the world," cried Molly, catching a glimpse of Jerusha not far behind. "The dress is short as pie-crust."

In the eyes of good old-fashioned Mrs. Runnell the dress was in fact inches too short; and could Inez and Molly have known how narrowly it escaped being lengthened that morning they certainly would have shuddered.

"*Does n't* she look astonished, though?" continued Molly, nodding at Jerusha. "I don't

believe she ever saw a procession at Shy Corner."

"Unless it was a funeral procession," corrected Inez gayly, skipping into step.

It was a grand street-parade, as was conceded even by Inez' Cousin Matilda from Boston. Behind the glittering brass band marched files of distinguished citizens, veteran soldiers, and military companies; and behind these the school-children, led by the Children of the Veterans. Among the Daughters appeared Weezy Rowe and her friend Kisty Nye; and it is needless to add that foremost among the "Sons" were Kirke Rowe and his once devoted attendant, Jimmy Maguire.

"How gay it is, Inez!" cried Molly, holding her head erect, forgetful of the pain.

"Everybody is in the procession, and the rest are at the windows," laughed her companion, lowering the flag as they entered the Park.

Inez enjoyed being admired, and she walked

with a proud step, conscious of her new white dress, filmy with lace. This dress was the idol of her heart; and when she and Molly seated themselves among the other Daughters of the Veterans on the benches erected opposite the speaker's stand, Inez was careful not to crush the skirt.

"It 's nice and cool here under the elms," exclaimed Molly, thankful to lay down the heavy flag-pole. "I 'd like to rest all day."

She soon tired, however, of the exercises that followed. While the band played and the children sang, it was all very well; but the speeches — even Grandpa Rowe's — grew tedious. She was glad when they were over, and the procession had marched back to the Common and disbanded.

"Supposing Gallatin *is* one hundred years old to-day, Inez; I don't see why they need ring all the bells!" said she, leaning wearily against a tree after the Daughters of the Vet-

erans had broken ranks and dispersed. "My head grows worse and worse, and I want my dinner."

"Oh, go home with me, Molly, please," urged little Jerusha at her elbow, "and I'll give you some gingerbread. Grandmarm makes it terrible nice."

"Oh, thank you ever so much," said Molly, really half-famished. "Yes, I'd like to go."

"If you go, Molly, I'm going too," remarked Inez, coolly. Was she to be parted from her dearest friend by that little Mother Bunch?

"Oh dear, I didn't ask Inez Dutton. I wonder if it's city manners to go where you haven't been asked?" mused vexed little Jerusha. "That girl's always picking upon me. Howsomever, I suppose I must treat her decent. Grandmarm says it won't do not to be civil. I saw a tremendous funny little snail this morning," she continued aloud, as she led

the girls into a narrow path skirting the back of the Common.

"Oh, where, where?" cried Inez, eagerly tripping at her heels.

"Over there by the bog. There are lots of snails there, — real beauties, with shells all striped and spotted," said Jerusha, trudging ahead in her calf-skin shoes. "I like to see 'em put their horns out. I always think of grandmarm's cow at Shy Corner, when she used to try to hook down the orchard fence."

"Let's go and hunt for the snails," said Inez, her curiosity excited. "I'd forgotten they had any horns. You know we don't see snails here in the city very often, Jerusha," she added loftily. "Where you come from, though, I suppose they're as thick as spatter." And she curled her lip as if to imply that Jerusha must have come from a very queer place.

"Yes, they *are* thick, and I don't have to look for 'em there in bog-holes, either," returned Jerusha with some spirit, wondering why snails should be considered not quite respectable. "I call it terrible marshy round the Common here. In spots it 's a regular podge."

"Something like bean porridge, Jerusha, is n't it?" sneered Inez, turning her head to wink at Molly.

This set Molly to laughing; but she stopped as soon as she could. "This *is* a horrid wet corner, Inez," said she, resolved to make everything smooth. "Don't you remember how we had to go round it last spring in our May walk?"

"No, Molly; did we?"

"I 'd hate to come this way with that nice dress on, Inez," observed Jerusha with a backward glance at the swaying lace; "you might get it dirty."

"Humph! Wants to send me home, does she?" soliloquized offended Inez. "She can't get rid of me so easily. I never soil my dresses, Jerusha," she responded aloud; "it's very ill-bred to soil one's clothes."

"That Inez does pester me powerful bad; I won't speak to her again if I can help it," mused little Jerusha, turning to address Molly.

"You know, Molly," said she, looking past her tormentor as if Inez had been a bush in the path, — "you know if anybody should stumble into that sticky stuff 't would be considerable disagreeable for 'em."

"Who talks of stumbling? I never stumble," retorted Inez, rudely. "It's clumsy girls that stumble." And dancing on tiptoe to show how agile she was, Inez sprang by Jerusha toward a grassy knoll on their right.

"Not that way! Oh, that is n't the way! That is n't where I saw the snails, Inez," cried

Jerusha, forgetting all resentment in her panic. "Oh, do come back, Inez. Do, do!"

"Oh, Inez, please come!" called Molly.

"Yes, yes, in a minute; as soon as I've picked that flower," said Inez, with a graceful, sweeping courtesy, lately learned at dancing-school.

The backward step sunk her, alas! ankle-deep in the treacherous bog.

"Help me, girls, oh, quick, I'm slipping!" she shrieked. "Oh, oh! the grass is full of water!"

Molly and Jerusha ran forward, but it was too late. Before they could reach Inez, down she went, with all her finery, headlong into the mire; and when she scrambled out, such a sight as she was! Even a slimy frog might have pitied her. Her dainty French kid boots looked like clumps of clay, her filmy white dress like a tangle of sea-weed, and her lovely pink hat like a brown toadstool in the rain.

"Oh, dear, dear!" she spluttered, blowing the dirty water from her mouth. "What shall I do? How shall I ever get home?"

"Oh, Inez, it's too bad! It's a horrid, wicked shame!" began Molly, in the deepest sympathy; but she ended with a laugh. "Oh, Inez, if you only could see how funny you do look! Why, your face is as black as a crow. And then your hat! It drips like an umbrella. Oh, oh!"

"I should think you'd be ashamed to stand there and laugh, Molly Rowe," sobbed Inez angrily, wiping her face with her pocket handkerchief, and making the pocket handkerchief very dirty without making her face at all clean. "I should think even Jimmy Maguire would behave better 'n that!"

Molly, weak and silly from her headache, choked a second giggle, and went to aid forgiving little Jerusha in brushing away the mire. This proved a hopeless task.

"It is n't any use, Molly; we can't clean the gown decent," cried Jerusha at last, in despair. "Let 's all traipse into my house and get grandmarm to help. Grandmarm always knows just what to do."

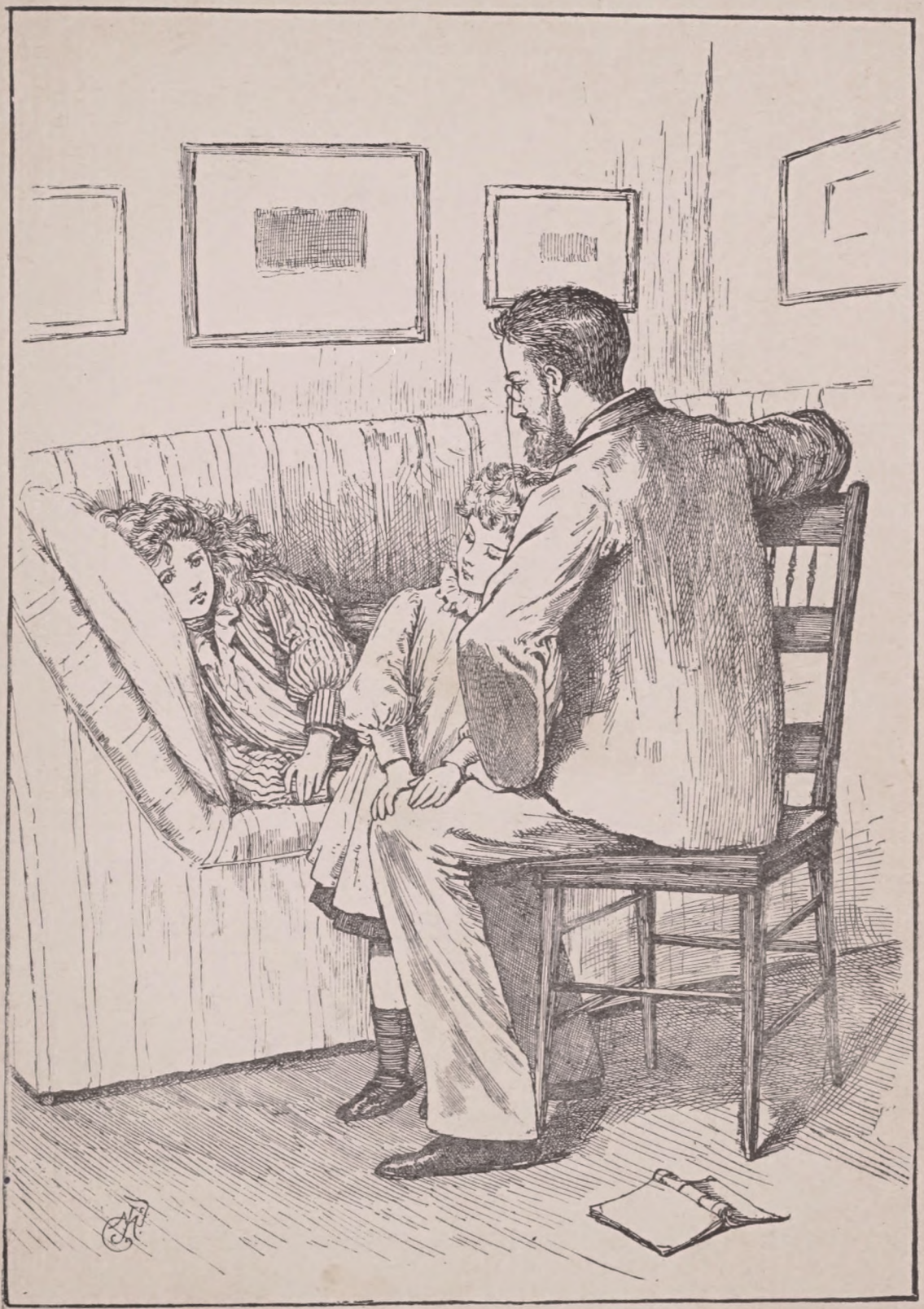
On seeing Inez' sad plight, the first thing Mrs. Runnell did, was to throw up both hands with an exclamation; the next, was to bring warm water and towels. Then, when the luckless girl had been thoroughly cleansed from the mud of the swamp, good Mrs. Runnell lent her an entire suit of Jerusha's garments, including the purple calico gown. As Inez surveyed herself clad in this much ridiculed dress, she wept afresh.

"Why, Molly Rowe, I 'd almost as lief die, as wear this through the streets to-day!" whispered she while Mrs. Runnell and her granddaughter were out of the room. "But I can't say so to them, they 've been so good. And what if I should meet Cousin Matilda!"

"You sha' n't wear that outrageous dress, Inez," exclaimed Molly, pausing in the act of eating gingerbread. "I 'll tell you what to do. You wait here, and I 'll go to your house and bring you whatever you want."

"Oh, will you do that, Molly? Oh, you angel!" cried Inez, crushing her friend and the gingerbread in a warm embrace. "I did n't like to ask you because your head is so bad; but, Molly Rowe, if you will bring me a dress, I 'll love you forever and ever!"

Had Inez been forced to walk through the city that gala day in little Jerusha's despised gown, I think it would have been no worse than she deserved; but Molly was kind, and fatigued as she was, went to Mr. Dutton's house for fresh garments. By the time she had returned with them her head throbbed violently; and on reaching her own home, she threw herself upon the sofa, completely prostrated.



MOLLY AND UNCLE DOCTOR.—Page 69.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE DOCTOR.

THE walk to and from Mr. Dutton's in the heat, in addition to the other fatigues of Anniversary Day, proved too much for Molly. After dreaming all night of brass bands and snails and mud-puddles, she awoke next morning so weak and feverish that Dr. Wyman was sent for.

He found her tossing restlessly upon the nursery lounge, in a tea-gown of pale blue.

"So you have a headache, my young lady! Nonsense! what do you want of that?" he began sportively, as he counted her pulse. "Little girls like you should n't meddle with headaches!"

"Molly is n't much sickish, Uncle Doctor. She 's just a little sickish, that 's all," said

Weezy, edging herself in between her uncle and Molly.

Dr. Wyman laughed. "That 's right, Little Miss Weezy, defend your sister. Did you fancy I was scolding her for being ill? Indeed I was n't. And I sha' n't scold her for having worked so hard over that fair last summer, either, though I do suppose that fair helped along this illness."

"Oh, uncle, I did n't work any harder than some of the other girls did," said Molly, languidly.

But she was gratified by Dr. Wyman's remark. If she must suffer, it was pleasant to be told she was suffering from being too good, and she listened eagerly for what her uncle might say next. He said nothing at all; so after a pause she asked him if he really thought the Boys' Reading-room could be ready by Christmas.

"Yes, I think so," said he, drawing a small

leather case from his pocket. "When the Reading-room is in working order, you little Sewing-society girls ought to be happy, for you will have done a good thing for the poor boys of the neighborhood. Now, will you open your mouth, please?" And he took from the case a small glass thermometer, which he pressed under Molly's tongue.

Weezy, as it chanced, had never seen the little glass instrument before.

"What is it, Uncle Doctor? Is it to eat? Is it an *ice-pickle?*" she cried in wonder.

"No, no, little Miss Query! It is not an icicle. We'll call it a heat-tickle, if you like; and we'll ask it presently how hot Sister Molly is."

Molly wanted to answer for herself that she already knew that she was a great deal hotter than she wished to be. It vexed her to have to lie there so mute with that hard, round thing hurting her tongue; and when Kirke

dashed in and began to make fun of her, it vexed her more than ever.

"Oho, Molly! Smoking, are you? I've caught you at it!" he cried, flinging himself down upon the floor beside her lounge, and pulling Weezy into his lap. "You look now just as Grandpa Nye does after dinner when he drops to sleep with his pipe in his mouth. Leave it to Weezy if you don't!"

"No, indeed-y, Molly; you don't look any such thing," rejoined Weezy, indignantly. "Grandpa Nye's face is all whiskery, and has wrinkles in."

"See here, Molly, did you know you'd left your mouth open?" pursued teasing Kirke. "If you keep it open that way at Drummond, John Hodges'll take it for the post-office letter-box."

"And I shall take you for a chatter-box, Kirke, and pack you off to the Drummond jail if you persist in annoying Molly," said Dr. Wyman in a jesting tone, but with a look

that told Kirke he had carried his joking far enough.

Molly shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She wished Kirke and Weezy would go out of doors. She wished Baby Donald in the next room would cease fretting. Above all, she wished her mamma would come. How is it these mammas know so quickly when they are needed? Molly had hardly begun to long for her mother, before Mrs. Rowe walked in, bearing a covered dish on a little silver tray. She approached very quietly in her soft gray dress, and the moment she laid her cool hand on Molly's forehead, the little daughter felt comforted.

"Here is some nice orange sherbet that Aunt Louise sent you, dear," she said, in a soothing, playful tone. "I 'm sure you 'll like it better than that little glass tube of your uncle's."

"Why so? This little glass tube is not to

be despised, let me tell you," retorted Dr. Wyman, pretending to be offended. "It's a knowing little instrument."

"What does it say about Molly?" asked Mrs. Rowe, rather anxiously, when he had taken it to the window.

"It says," replied the doctor dryly, holding the tube to the light, — "it says that Molly is a little feverish, and that her brother and sister must not vex her."

"Does the little glass say that *honest*, mamma?" whispered Weezy, eying the thermometer with awe.

"Oh, Weezy, please don't whisper," groaned Molly, with her hands over her eyes.

"If I'll stop, may I have a taste of that orange ice-cream, — a big bouncing taste?"

"I'm ashamed of you, little daughter," said Mrs. Rowe, pressing her finger gently upon the child's lips. "Do you want to be hired to be kind to your poor sister?"

"N–no, 'course not, mamma," answered Weezy, hanging her head. Then suddenly raising it, she amused everybody by adding, "Molly's sick, you know, mamma. If Molly eats all the orange ice-cream I'm 'fraid 't will make her worser!"

"Oh, let her have some sherbet, mamma; I sha' n't want it all," said the young invalid, with a forlorn smile.

"Will Molly be well enough to go to Drummond next Saturday, do you think?" asked Mrs. Rowe, following the doctor into the hall to learn about Molly's medicines.

"I trust so, if nothing new sets in," replied Dr. Wyman. "And I would n't mind if she should stay away all the fall. The air of those Berkshire hills will give her strength."

"I don't want to go home with grandpa, mamma. I thought I did, but I don't," cried Molly, the moment her uncle was out of hearing. "I don't want to go anywhere without

you. I'd rather lie right here on this sofa forever and ever."

"That is because you feel so exhausted to-day, dear," said her mamma, gently stroking Molly's flushed cheek. "It was friendly in you to do that errand yesterday for Inez, but I am sorry you did not send Jerusha in your place. You were not able to go to Mr. Dutton's, and the walk has made you ill."

"Jerusha did n't know the way to the Duttons'. Besides, mamma," confessed Molly, hiding her face with her mother's hands, "it was n't all the walk. My head ached in the morning. If I'd told you how it ached you'd have made me stay at home, I'm sure you would. Oh, I wish I *had* told you!"

"Poor Molly!"

"Why do you pity me, mamma? Why don't you say this illness is good enough for me? *I* would, if I were you," said Molly, beginning to cry.

"Don't, Molly dear; don't cry so! It will hurt your head," said her mamma, drawing away her hands to smooth back Molly's bright, rumpled hair. "If you concealed anything from mamma I think you are sufficiently punished. I do not believe you will do such a thing again."

"Oh no, mamma; no, no!"

Mrs. Rowe sat thus a long time, passing her hand over her little daughter's aching head, and speaking to her now and then in a gentle, caressing tone. As Molly grew calmer they began to talk again of the visit to Drummond.

"Papa has a lovely surprise for you, Molly, at grandpa's," said her mamma presently, in a voice delightfully mysterious. "He thought of keeping it for Christmas, but he has concluded that you may as well know about it now."

"Oh mamma, mamma! Oh, what can it be!

Oh, please tell me this minute!" cried Molly, starting up from the lounge.

"Remember, Molly, it's a great secret, and Kirke and Weezy are not to be told at present."

"Yes, yes, mamma."

"Well, it's a little — a little — "

"Oh, mamma, don't say it's a little pug dog! Bruno would shake him to pieces!"

"It's a little black Welsh pony."

"A live pony? Oh mamma, mamma, Mamma Rowe!" cried Molly so loudly that she nearly waked the at last sleeping baby. "Oh, mamma, I want to hug papa this minute! Oh, I think he's the best papa in the world!"

"I knew you'd be overjoyed, dear," said Mrs. Rowe, looking nearly as delighted as Molly. "Grandpa Rowe is having the pony kept for you in his stable; and when you go to Drummond, he will let John Hodges saddle it for you every day."

"Oh, oh, oh! And is there a saddle too; and can I ride whenever I choose, mamma?"

"Whenever grandma is willing. At grandma's, I shall expect you to do as grandma wishes," said Mrs. Rowe with emphasis. "You won't be selfish, Molly, will you, and go riding when your grandma needs you?" she added gently. "As soon as you're well enough, I'm sure you'll help grandma all you can. You can thread her needles, you know, and run up and down stairs to save her steps."

"And if she wants new cap-ribbons I can jump upon my pony and canter down to the village to buy them," cried Molly gayly, leaning upon her elbow. "Oh, mamma, you haven't told me what they call the pony."

"I believe he is waiting for you to christen him," said Mrs. Rowe, smiling.

"Oh, can I christen him anything I like? And if Inez comes in after school may I tell her about him, mamma?"

"Yes, dear; but caution her not to speak of him to Kirke and Weezy. They would be so impatient to see him that they could hardly contain themselves."

Inez called that afternoon, and was as charmed and excited by her friend's glad tidings as Molly could have desired. By that time Molly had about decided to name the pony Shelto; and she asked Inez to tell this to Jerusha.

"Yes, I will," said Inez, as she was leaving. "And, honor bright, I mean to try my best to treat the little Aunt Grimes as well as you do, Molly," she added, with a comical grimace. "Jerusha *is* a good little thing, and she was awfully sweet to me yesterday."

CHAPTER VII.

A PARLOR CAR.

CONCERNING the visit to her grandfather's Molly felt all sorts of ways. When her head ached, she thought she would not leave her mother for anything. When it was easier, she said she wanted to see her grandma so that she did not know what to do. And the worst of it was that nobody would decide for her; she could go or stay, exactly as she pleased.

After Dr. Wyman's call Wednesday morning she lay upon the sofa nearly all day thinking about her pony. Thursday she sat up a part of the time, dressing a doll for Weezy and playing "pigs in clover." Friday she was well enough to wander about the house. That

afternoon her mamma went down town and brought her home a new gossamer cloak and a small silk umbrella. Molly had never had an umbrella of her own before, and this was a beauty, with a silver handle engraved with her name. The child's delight knew no bounds. She opened and closed the umbrella a great many times, and finally took a turn in the sunny yard with it, arrayed in the new gossamer. Apparently the umbrella and the cloak between them helped her to make up her mind; for on coming back to the sitting-room she walked straight to Grandpa Rowe and said:

"I've decided, grandpa. I'm going home with you to-morrow. Are you glad?"

"Glad, my dear? To be sure I am. I'm exceedingly glad," said he, laying down his book with one hand, and pushing up his spectacles with the other. "Sit here, and let us talk about it."

Tall as she was, Grandpa Rowe would have

taken Molly in his lap, only Weezy got there first, shouting merrily, —

"Oh, you're too big enough, Molly Rowe; you'd hurt grandpa all to pieces! Grandpa's got a bone in his knee."

"What a wise girl! Who told you, Bright-eyes, that I had a bone in my knee?" asked grandpa laughingly, smoothing Weezy's short curls.

"Oh, Jimmy Maguire, he told me. Jimmy says ministers always have bones in their knees."

"Well, I'll sit on the arm of grandpa's chair, then. There aren't any bones in that," said Molly, with a sportive glance at her grandfather that meant, "Isn't my sister a little goosie?"

"Oh, take care, Molly, you sit down too tight," cried Weezy, drawing back her hand. "You 'most squoze my skeeter-mite. If you squeeze my skeeter-mite, it'll make it awful worse."

"What 'll you do, Louise, when I 'm gone way off?" asked Molly, finally mounted to the little lady's satisfaction.

"Oh, I 'll play with your little tea-set," replied Weezy, promptly.

Molly jumped up, horrified. That tea-set was her special pride, — far, far too precious for common handling.

"No, indeed; you must n't play with my tea-set!" cried she. "You know I only take it out when I have company. Promise me you won't touch it, Weezy. Promise me this minute!"

Weezy looked roguish, and shut her lips so tight that the smallest promise in the world could n't have slipped through.

"Oh, little sister, don't you remember you dropped one of my dishes once? I would n't have you drop another for anything, — not for anything!" went on Molly, her violet eyes growing darker and darker. "Why, grandpa,

papa gave me that tea-set when I was a little girl, and it 's as good as ever it was all but the handle of one teacup. Weezy knocked that off long ago. I was so angry! She said she 'd broken the 'cup of a handle.' "

"Well, I told you I sha' n't do it again," said Weezy, placidly.

"I think I 'd forgive that accident now, Molly, if your little sister will promise not to meddle with your china a second time," remarked grandpa pleasantly, giving Weezy a hug that sent his spectacles flying.

"There, grandpa loved me so much his glasses came off," said the child, picking them up in great glee.

"I hope Weezy is going to be a good little girl," continued Grandpa Rowe, "for if she is a good girl grandma and I want her and Kirke to come to see you at the parsonage next Thanksgiving."

"Oh, grandpa, do you mean it, truly? Oh,

I'm so happy I want to climb a tree!" shouted Weezy, clapping her hands and slipping down to the floor. "Oh, thanks, grandpa! thanks, thanks, thanks!"

"If you please, my dear," said Grandpa Rowe, with his genial smile, "I'd prefer that you should say, 'Thank you, grandpa;' *not* 'Thanks.'"

"Oh, would you, grandpa?" asked Weezy, a little surprised. "Then I suppose, grandpa, you'd like to have me say, Thank-you-givings Day, not Thanksgivings Day? Oh, I will, then. I'll say every single, dingle thing you want me to. And I won't even look at Molly's tea-set. I won't, certain true!"

"I didn't believe you'd be naughty, little sister," said Molly, trying to kiss her under the chin.

She might as easily have tried to kiss the throat of a humming-bird. Weezy was already half across the room to greet Kirke with the

happy news, of which he had been previously informed.

"Did you know, Kirke, — oh, did anybody tell you?" she cried, whirling on one foot. "We're going to Drummond, — you and me are! We're going Thankyougivings Day, — Turkey Day, you know!"

"Oh yes, Weezy; and we shall see Billy Woolsey," cried Kirke, mischievously. "Won't that be fine?"

Weezy's face clouded. "No, it won't be fine a bit," said she. "I don't like Billy Woolsey. I don't like him at all, at all."

"Oh yes, Weezy, you like him better than you think you do," exclaimed Molly, laughing. "Did n't he bring you nice red apples?"

The prospect of this visit from Kirke and Weezy was a great help to Molly in leaving home next morning. It was the very kind of a day that she would have chosen, — damp enough to allow of the new gossamer and

umbrella, yet not damp enough to spoil the Gobelin blue hat which exactly matched her dress. Molly, as she followed Grandpa Rowe into the parlor car, felt quite important, and secretly hoped that the passengers would suspect the fact that she was an invalid, banished to the country for her health. She tried to carry the umbrella carelessly, as if she had always had it, and to keep firm hold of her pretty bag filled with gifts to enliven her journey.

To begin with, there was "Sara Crewe," from her papa, and a silver bonbon-box of marsh-mallows from her mamma. Then there was a Chinese puzzle from Kirke; oh, yes, and a phial of smelling-salts from Inez, in case of Molly's being faint, which she had hardly ever been in her life. But the most embarrassing gift of all was a short-stemmed bouquet from Weezy, that untied and scattered in every direction the moment Molly had passed through

the car door. While she was darting hither and thither for the flowers, the porter came forward.

"Our chairs are numbers seventeen and nineteen," said Grandpa Rowe, handing him the tickets.

"This way, sir, please," said the porter, conducting the travellers to two high-backed stuffed chairs near the centre of the car, and putting Molly's umbrella above them in the rack.

"But where are the numbers, grandpa?" asked Molly, arranging her parcels.

"On the sides of the car, opposite the chairs, Molly. Don't you find the number seventeen there at your elbow?"

"Oh yes, here it is. What an out-of-the-way place, grandpa! I wonder why they don't put the numbers on the chairs themselves, as they put them on the pews at church. And that makes me think, grandpa,

I hope I shall be well enough to go to church to-morrow."

"I hope so too, my dear."

"I would rather go to church at Drummond than anywhere else in the world; the people are so nice, and the old church is so queer. Do you remember that Sunday, grandpa, once when Weezy was at church, when she cried because you went into that high pulpit to preach? She was afraid you could n't get down!"

"Yes indeed, I remember it very well," returned Grandpa Rowe, laughing. "When she comes at Thanksgiving she must go into the church with John Hodges some day and run all about it."

"Does John Hodges still ring the bell, grandpa?"

"Yes, every Sabbath; and at morning, noon, and night on week-days besides," said Grandpa Rowe, putting on his railroad cap. "And the

breakfast bell is at seven o'clock in the morning. What do you think of rising before that hour, my little city girl?"

"Oh, I shall ask grandma to wake me," answered Molly rather soberly, being in fact not particularly fond of early rising.

Presently her grandfather went to sleep, and not caring to read, she sat and observed the passengers in the car. The most of these were grown people; but across the aisle she saw a pretty baby who reminded her of dear little Donald at home. The baby was in the arms of a sweet, pale-faced lady, and beside the lady sat a handsome boy a little older than Molly, whom the lady called Harry. Once the baby cried, and Harry walked with it till it became quiet; and once when Molly's box of bonbons rolled from her lap he picked it up and presented it to her with a low bow. In receiving the box Molly blushed very prettily. She thought that Harry was a remark-

ably polite boy, and that she would certainly tell Inez Dutton about him. She might possibly tell Jerusha Runnell too.

Gradually Molly's eyelids drew together, and when she opened them some time later, between herself and her grandfather stood a small table bearing two bowls of smoking oyster-stew. Molly blinked, and looked as bewildered as if Aladdin's wonderful lamp were shining straight in her eyes.

"Why, grandpa, what's this? where did it come from?" asked she in so astonished a tone that her grandfather could not help laughing.

"Did you fancy we'd had a visit from the fairies, Miss Drowsy-orbs?" he said, raising the curtain. "Oh no; not unless you call our respectable porter here a brownie. And now will you please wake, my dear, and favor me with your company at dinner?"

"Indeed I will," said Molly, laughing; think-

ing to herself, as she drew off her gloves, "How kind and respectful grandpa always is! Why, he treats me exactly as if I were a lady."

Yet delightful as it seemed to be seated facing her grandfather at table in that grown-up fashion, she was not in the least hungry. She fancied this might be because the handsome boy across the aisle sipped his soup with so disagreeable a noise. She wished he would not do that way. She wondered his mother did not reprove him; and concluded that the boy was not half so nice as he at first had appeared.

To tell the truth, Molly's head was aching severely. After partaking of ice-cream at dessert it ached harder than before; and she scarcely spoke another word till her grandfather and herself left the train at Brandon. Here they found John Hodges with the carryall waiting to take them to Drummond, four miles away.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHELTO.

THE parsonage was a great square white house, with great square brick chimneys, and it stood on a hill about a mile from the village. Molly's father had been born in that house, and her grandfather before him, and though called the parsonage, it belonged to Grandpa Rowe.

"It's the pleasantest place on earth to me, Molly," said Grandpa Rowe, as John Hodges turned old Dobbin into the driveway leading to it, "and I want all my grandchildren to love it too."

"Oh, we do; oh, *don't* we, though, grandpa?" cried Molly, refreshed by the sight of the dear old homestead. "And look, there's grandma!

Don't you see her on the front doorstep between the tall poplars? Oh, is n't she a sweet, pretty little grandma?"

Grandpa Rowe only smiled happily, but you may be sure he knew as well as anybody that Grandma Rowe was one of the loveliest little women this side of Paradise.

She met her little granddaughter with a kiss, took her hat, and was about to seat her in the easiest rocking-chair, when Molly surprised her by frisking off to the orchard to see the new pony. He was munching an apple, but on spying Molly politely dropped it, and trotted toward her.

"Oh, you beauty!" cried she, extending her hand rather timidly to stroke his mane. "Oh, you raving, tearing beauty!"

The pony whinnied, as if to thank his young mistress for this rather doubtful compliment, and behaved in a manner so highly decorous that she was enchanted with him, and very

sorry when John Hodges' wife came to call her to supper.

It soon became evident that Molly was far too excited to eat, and having persuaded her to drink a glass of milk, grandma presently went upstairs with her to her room, followed by Toodles. Toodles was the parsonage cat, — a beautiful black puss, with three white stockings, two green eyes, and a wise old head.

"I thought I'd give you the Snowball Room, Molly, so you would be near grandpa and me," said her grandma, opening the door of the sunny southeast chamber.

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Molly, fondling the old-fashioned wall-paper, with its clusters of greenish white. "I like it best of all."

The room was all in white, like a bride. The high-posted white bedstead held up a white canopy, which grandma called a "tester;" there were full white curtains around

the bed and at the windows, and even the half-moon dressing-table under the mirror was draped in white.

"My trunk looks ashamed of itself here, grandma," said Molly, laughing; "but I'm glad the stage has brought it. I want to get it unpacked and out of the way."

John Hodges had already unstrapped it, and on lifting the lid, Molly perceived in the tray a strange, neatly folded parcel of dark green.

"I wonder what this can be, grandma? It is n't anything of mine," said she, shaking it out.

Then she saw what it was, and nearly went wild with delight.

"Oh, grandma! Will you look? Oh, *will* you? It's a lovely new riding-habit!" cried she, kissing her grandma on each cheek. "I must try it on this minute. Oh, was n't it like dear, beautiful mamma to surprise me in this way?"

Very soon the happy child was prancing around the room in the new habit, holding up the long skirt with both hands. Suddenly she paused to ask, —

"Which hat will look best with it, grandma, the brown or the black? Wait, please, and I'll take them both out of the bandbox and see what you think."

Running again to the trunk, she pulled off the cover of the box, and beside the other hats what should appear but a new riding-hat of dark green!

This last blissful surprise was more than Molly's weakened nerves could bear, and she actually cried for joy. Grandma Rowe insisted upon her going straight to bed, and the weary child soon fell asleep. She slept all night, and she slept so hard next morning that grandma wouldn't wake her; and the barnyard fowls couldn't wake her, though they crowed, and cackled, and quacked as noisily as if they had

not been minister's fowls, and the day had not been Sunday.

But when John Hodges rang the first bell for church, Molly opened her eyes and sprang up in haste, mortified to have kept the breakfast waiting. What would John Hodges' wife think of her? She stood in great awe of this thrifty, sharp-tongued housekeeper, who seemed to regard children as so much "clutter;" but "Little Miss Weezy" had never been in the least afraid of her. Weezy called Mr. and Mrs. Hodges "Mr. John" and "Mrs. Filura;" and Kirke and Molly had fallen into the same habit. Mr. John was tall and awkward, with a mouth like the slit in a child's savings bank, and small eyes that did not agree; but he was very kind to Molly, and in the days that followed was constantly devising things for her entertainment. She was extremely fond of Mr. John; the only drawback to her happiness at this time being his bustling wife. Molly used

to speak of her to Myra Woolsey, a farmer's daughter of about her own age who lived at the foot of the hill. She told Myra she always felt as if Mrs. Filura wanted to sweep her out of the kitchen with a broom. Myra would say it was a burning shame for Mrs. Hodges to act so; and Molly would beg Myra not to hint the state of affairs to Grandma Rowe, lest grandma should be troubled.

The girls had varied and lively chats together, especially after Myra began to mount her father's old bay and go to ride with Molly. The tall bay horse looked so very, very large in contrast with the little black pony, that John Hodges usually called them "the elephant" and "the mouse." Almost every pleasant morning "the mouse," with Molly on his back, might have been seen pacing down the parsonage hill to the weather-beaten cottage behind the cinnamon-rose bushes to join "the elephant" carrying Myra. Thence the

oddly matched pair often galloped along the village street, past the white church with its box of a steeple, past the academy, to the stone watering-trough in front of Squire Twaddle's office. There, while their gay young riders planned the day's excursion, the steeds would take a friendly drink together. In whatever direction the girls rode, they were sure to return by way of the post-office, that stood on a back street, and not a stone's throw from the county jail.

One morning, in calling as usual for the mail, Molly and Myra passed on the sidewalk a feeble old man, limping along with a cane, and now and then pausing to cough.

"Poor cripple! He looks old enough to die," whispered Molly, touching Myra's skirt, hanging over the shoulder of "the elephant." "Do see how he trembles!"

"Why, have n't you met him before?" said Myra, in a louder tone, as they left the man

behind them. "I've met him about the post-office no end of times. It's Jerry Steele, the horse-thief."

"A horse-thief!" ejaculated Molly, reining in her pony at the office. "If he's a thief, why don't they put him in jail?"

"Oh, they have put him in jail. He's in jail now," returned Myra, taking the mail that the postmaster had brought out.

"Oh, what a story, Myra! Didn't we just see him on the sidewalk?" cried Molly, riding on, laughing.

"I mean they lock him in the jail at night," said Myra, galloping after, and laughing herself; "but he's so sick and so shaky they let him out daytimes to get the air. Mr. Carr — he's the jailer, you know — told father yesterday he shouldn't be surprised if Jerry didn't live till the trial, next March."

All the way home Molly could talk of nothing but this miserable, limping, coughing Jerry

Steele. It was not till she had alighted from the pony at the parsonage that she thought to look at the letters. Two of these were for herself. One was a dear, quaint, affectionate little billet from Jerusha Runnell, saying that she missed Molly from school "terrible bad," and she hoped she'd hurry back as soon as ever she "got her health."

"Dear little Jerusha! I wish she could see how plump I've grown in the month I've been here," commented Molly, folding the sheet. "I'm just as well as I can be; and if it was n't for Mrs. Filura I should be just as happy as the days are long."

Country life was indeed doing wonders for the child. Cantering among the hills on her pony, in the bracing autumn weather, she had left her headaches behind her, and become as round and rosy as the sweet apples set to bake for her by Mrs. Filura.

The second letter was from Molly's mamma,

and Molly hopped up and down for joy as she read it. Besides a pleasant message from Inez, it contained the delightful news that, owing to unexpected reasons, Kirke and Weezy were to be sent to Drummond earlier than had been intended, and Molly might look for them the following week.

CHAPTER IX.

TOODLES.

"I WONDER what Weezy will say when she sees Toodles and her six kittens!" exclaimed Molly the next morning as she fed the cat.

"I suspect she'll open those big brown eyes of hers wider than ever," said Grandma Rowe, smiling down upon her knitting. "Dear child, I want her in my arms this minute."

"Just think, grandma, in less than a week she and Kirke will be here; and they'll see my pony!" continued Molly, setting the saucer of milk on the dining-room hearth. "The night they come I mean to bring Toodles back to her bed in the sitting-room, would n't you, grandma, and have her and the Toodles

kins lying together all in a heap? They 'll show off better there."

"I would," said grandma, at once entering into Molly's spirit. "And we 'll make a new counterpane in honor of the occasion. I have a remnant of red cretonne about the right size."

"Oh, have you? Red will be exactly the color for Toodles,—so becoming to her black fur! And pillows too, grandma. Don't you think Toodles ought to have pillows?"

"To be sure she ought, and pillows she shall have. I 'll stuff them, Molly, and you may hem the counterpane."

"Oh, will you make pillows, grandma, and sprinkle catnip leaves inside them to please Toodles?"

"Certainly, I will," smiled grandma, thinking that Toodles would not be the only one pleased; "and if you 'll bring the bag of pieces we 'll measure off the spread and pillow-slips at once."

"I'm afraid you don't want to stop your knitting," said Molly, hesitating.

"Yes, I do, dear. Little Donald's stockings can wait," replied grandma, pressing her needles into the ball of yarn, while Molly rushed away to the storeroom.

"I skipped across the wet kitchen on tiptoe, grandma," said she, coming back with the bag, and a clouded face. "I tried not to leave any tracks, but Mrs. Filura went after me with a mop."

"Did she? She's fussy about some things," said grandma, carelessly, little suspecting how Mrs. Filura's "fussy" ways troubled Molly. "There, this is the cretonne, Molly. Won't you see if it is long enough for the bedstead?"

The bedstead itself looked long enough for a short baby. It was one that John Hodges had made for Toodles from the backs of two old-fashioned chairs, and having a tall headboard and a tall footboard, it was not unlike

Molly's in the Snowball Room, excepting in being black.

"There 's enough to cover the bed, and *so* much over," said Molly, returning from the sitting-room, creasing the cretonne where it should be cut off.

Here there was a knock at the front door.

"Will you go, please, Molly?" asked Grandma Rowe, busying herself about the little pillows. "Filura has n't finished her scrubbing. I think that must be Squire Twaddle. Your grandfather expects him to-day."

Molly went to the door reluctantly, cherishing a secret grudge against this sour, solemn lawyer, who had once asked if she were the "only one in the family that had red hair."

"Grandma's so good I suppose she likes Squire Twaddle," mused she, pulling at the latch; "but I don't. He's the most disagreeable man in the world."

When she opened the door, "the most dis-

agreeable man in the world" stood on the doorstep under an umbrella, trying to smile. Molly did not think he succeeded very well; she thought he looked as if he was wiping his mouth with his lips. At sight of Molly he gave up trying to smile, and said in an injured tone, —

"I expected to see your grandfather, little girl."

"Grandpa is in the study; won't you walk in?" asked Molly timidly, feeling to blame for not being what Squire Twaddle wished.

The gentleman put down the umbrella, and stalked through the hall to the study door, where Toodles sat waiting upon the mat. Grandpa Rowe, who had been writing at his desk, arose to welcome him.

"Glad to see you, my friend," said he, laying down his pen to grasp Squire Twaddle's hand, which Molly was sure must be nearly as stiff and hard. "Have a seat by the fire."

But, remarking that he never petted himself, the Squire rejected the comfortable rocker, and chose the straightest backed chair in the room.

"If he does n't pet himself, then I 'm sure he never gets petted," mused Molly, as she played with the kittens in their basket beside the table. "Who 'd want to pet him?"

"That 's a fine feline group, — an unusually fine one," the Squire observed presently, when Toodles joined the kittens. "What of the mother puss, Mr. Rowe? Is she a good mouser?"

"An excellent one. She does n't allow a rat or a mouse on the premises," replied Mr. Rowe, taking from his desk the paper about which he wished to consult the lawyer.

"Ah, in that case I should like some time to ask the loan of her," said Squire Twaddle, putting on his spectacles. "The mice at my office are getting altogether too annoying."

"Very well; you are welcome to the cat at any time. Only you'll be obliged to take the whole family," added Grandpa Rowe, smiling. "Molly, here, is to have one of the kittens, and the others are promised."

Then the two men began to talk about business, and Molly, ill pleased, ran back to the dining-room, and told her grandma the conversation.

"The idea, grandma, of his asking for our darling old Toodles! Was n't he cool?" scolded she, taking up the cat's counterpane, and in her wrath setting some pretty long stitches. "I don't believe Toodles would like to stay in his ugly old law-office. I'd rather send her to the jail and let Jerry Steele have her."

"We don't know that Jerry wants her," said grandma, pleasantly; "and we *do* know that Squire Twaddle does. How would you like it, Molly, to live in a house running over with mice?"

"Like poor Bishop Hatto in his tower, grandma? Ugh! I should n't like it at all," shuddered Molly, laughing behind her frown; "and sooner than have Squire Twaddle eaten up alive, I 'd let him have Toodles, — only I hope he won 't take her before Kirke and Weezy come."

"I hope he 'll be kind to her," said Grandma Rowe, shaking up the little pillow she had finished. "Your grandpa and I have made a baby of Toodles. When she gets old I 'd like to send her to Cairo, where they say the Mussulmans have a hospital for superannuated cats."

CHAPTER X.

KIRKE AND WEEZY.

KIRKE and Weezy travelled alone all the way from Gallatin, enjoying the journey immensely, and happily unconscious that they had been put in care of the conductor. Weezy was so anxious to be ladylike and proper, that she kept on her bonnet, and sat up as prim as a marigold; and Kirke was so anxious to be gentlemanly and gallant, that he waited upon her by inches. As a result of this unusual self-restraint they reached Brandon in the wildest of spirits. There they were met by John Hodges with the carryall.

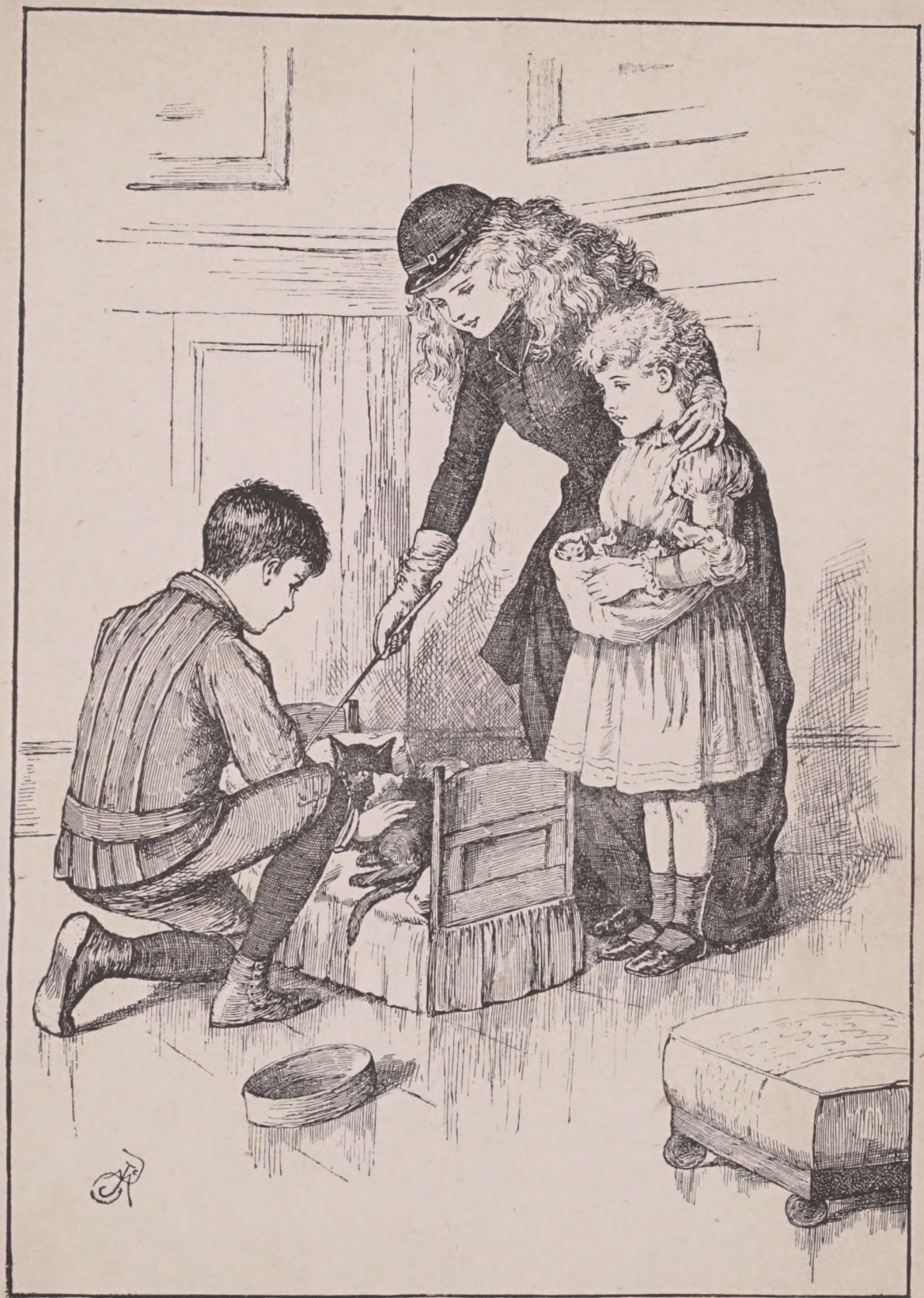
"Why didn't Molly come with you, Mr. John? We thought to be sure she'd come." exclaimed Kirke, beginning to feel that he

and Weezy were not being treated with due attention.

"Oh, Miss Molly's back here a piece," said John Hodges, very seriously, but with a smile lurking in the small eyes that did not agree.

And no sooner had old Dobbin taken them to a safe distance from the shrieking engine, than Molly appeared, cantering toward them on her pony. In the jaunty green riding-hat and habit Kirke and Weezy at first hardly knew her; but when they recognized her, and moreover learned that the pony was her own, their surprise and delight were beyond description. They were so frantic with joy that the wonder was how John Hodges got them safely home to the parsonage.

"You shall ride Shelto yourselves to-morrow, Kirke, — you and Weezy. I 'll lend him to you all day if you want him," said Molly, springing from the pony's back without assistance, as grandpa and grandma met them at the door.



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Weezy spied the Toodleses the moment she ran into the sitting-room, and as had been expected, opened her eyes wider than ever.

"Oh, grandpa! Oh, Molly! Oh, grandma!" she cried, dancing around the tiny red bed. "What a cunning little *kittery!* There's one, two, three, five, six, — six little black kitties with white feet on! Oh! oh! oh!"

"Toodles, Toodles," called Kirke, kneeling to stroke the cat's long, silky fur, "you remember me, don't you, Toodles?"

Toodles opened one green eye and purred "Yes."

"I thought you did! You're a wise cat," went on Kirke, slyly tickling her whiskers till he made her sneeze.

"Oh, don't do that, Kirke. Don't do like Jimmy Maguire. You must n't 'buse Toodles," cried Weezy, encircling with her short arms the whole Toodles family.

"What was that you were saying about Jimmy Maguire, Weezy? What is it that he does?" asked Grandpa Rowe, drawn from his study for the second time by the attraction of seeing his three grandchildren together at the homestead.

"Oh, Jimmy plays hand-organ with his kitty. Turns her tail round and round, — this way, you know, grandpa, — and makes the kitty mew horrid," said Weezy disapprovingly, twisting her sash to show Jimmy's method.

"I'm afraid Jimmy Maguire is a naughty boy, is n't he, Weezy?" asked grandpa, tenderly regarding the child and her big armful.

"Sort of naughty, grandpa."

"Why, Weezy, I think Jimmy is better than he used to be," cried Kirke, remembering with shame the time Jimmy had enticed him to run away from home. He had never been so intimate with Jimmy since that, but he still felt a warm pity for the neglected lad.

"Oh, Jimmy is n't very naughty," said Weezy, correcting herself. "And he is n't very good," she added, after a moment's reflection. "Jimmy 's just comfortable."

Grandpa Rowe walked hastily to the window, and came back to Weezy with a funny twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, little wife from St. Ives," said he, gayly, "you must put down your seven cats, for here comes Filura to call us to supper."

"Oh, I 'm ever and ever so glad," cried Weezy, giving the Toodlekins a parting squeeze before skipping off to the dining-room. "I 'm just as hungry as a *buzzy bee.* I did n't have any dinner!"

"Why, Louise Rowe," exclaimed her brother, "did n't Lovisa put us up a jolly luncheon?"

"Hoh, cinnanum cookies, and crumpets, and Parker's House rolls, they is n't dinners," retorted Weezy, scornfully. "I have n't had a truly table dinner this whole long day."

"Billy Woolsey wants to see you, Weezy," observed Molly, after grace had been said.

"Does he? He has n't sawn me since a great, great while ago, when I was little and cunning," returned Weezy, not wholly sorry to renew her acquaintance with teasing little Billy.

"How is mamma, Weezy?" continued Molly.

"Oh, she's just as thin, Molly. She eats killed-and-dried oatmeal to try to thicken herself."

"If kiln-dried oatmeal will thicken anybody I wish Jerry Steele could have some of it," said Molly, passing her brother the biscuits with a meaning smile. "You would n't believe, Kirke, that a man could be so thin as that old thief is at the jail."

"Have you been to see him, Molly?" asked Kirke in surprise.

"Not to the jail. You don't have to go to the jail to see Jerry Steele, or to hear him

either, — he coughs fearfully. He 's so lame and ill they don't lock him into his cell daytimes; they let him walk out as far as the post-office."

"That 's a funny way to keep jail, Molly. What if the thief should run away?"

Molly laughed merrily. "When you 've seen poor stiff old Jerry, you 'll know better than to say such a thing," said she, with an arch glance at her little sister's drooping eyelids. "He can't walk as fast as our baby can creep."

Long after Weezy had been tucked snugly into Molly's white bed, Kirke and Molly sat by the cone fire in the sitting-room talking with grandpa and grandma. There were a great many things to say. How the Boys' Reading-room was all painted and papered ready for the library, which the committee were to select for it; how Inez Dutton had called to inquire for Molly, and little Jerusha

Runnell had sent Molly a package of sweet-flagroot; how Jimmy Maguire wore a white collar every day; and how Kirke felt quite confident now of receiving his long-promised watch the coming Christmas.

Meanwhile the pendulum of the tall clock in the corner had been pacing off the time in long, even strides, till the hour-hand had crept around to quarter of nine. Neither of the children had observed that it was getting so late, but when they heard the porch door close with a slam, then they knew that John Hodges had started for the church to ring the nine-o'clock bell.

"Oh, can't I go with Mr. John, grandma, to hold the lantern?" asked Kirke, springing to his feet.

"And can't I go to take care of Kirke, grandma?" jested Molly.

"Yes, go by all means, my dears. You 'll sleep the better for a brisk walk," said their

grandma, binding off the toe of a stocking for little Donald.

Mr. Hodges was glad of the children's company, and having unlocked the church door, and admitted them to the vestibule, where hung the bell-rope, he showed them just how he pulled the rope to make the bell ring. He was very kind indeed, not only showing them how he rung the bell, but teaching them to ring it themselves, and letting them strike several peals. Kirke desired to pull the rope once all by himself, and having been allowed, was mortified to find he needed Molly's help. John Hodges soothed his wounded vanity, however, by saying, —

"That's a heavy tug for a boy of your size. You've got considerable muscle for a little chap, now, I tell you."

"I'd like to ring the bell for you every day, Mr. John," returned Kirke, picking up the lantern.

"You and Miss Molly together could do it as neat as a pin, I'll warrant," laughed Mr. Hodges, his teeth gleaming through the slit in his face which answered for a mouth.

Then they all went out of the church, and the door clanged behind them.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF JAIL.

"IF there's anybody in this world that I hate, it's Billy Woolsey," stormed Weezy, bursting into the kitchen like a small cyclone.

"Softly, softly, my dear child," cautioned Grandpa Rowe, passing through the room to speak to John Hodges. "You should n't hate anybody. You should n't hate a boy; you should hate his sins."

Abashed at this unexpected meeting with her grandfather, Weezy fled to Molly, seeding raisins in the pantry.

"If there's anybody's sins in this world that I hate, Molly Rowe," she began again with flashing eyes, "it's Billy Woolsey's sins."

"Why, Weezy, I thought you and Billy were having a beautiful time in the orchard," said Molly, going on seeding raisins for grandma's fruit-cake. "What has Billy been doing?"

"He throws apple-cores at me, — all *gnawed-y*, see!" cried Weezy, resentfully pointing to a slight stain upon her red dress. "I 'm going to show it to my mamma. I sha' n't play with Billy Woolsey, not any more, not ever!"

Molly gave her a raisin.

"I hate Billy Woolsey's sins; I wish my papa and mamma 'd come," said Weezy, pouting, as she tore the raisin open and fitted it to her finger like a thimble.

"Oh, so do I!" echoed Molly, in a tone of regret. "But you know they 're having the house painted and papered all new. And did I tell you, Weezy, of the stained-glass window that mamma wrote about?"

"No," said Weezy, her brow clearing; "who stained it? Can't Lovisa wash it off?"

"Oh, it's a window of colored glass, — like a church window, you know, Weezy. It's going to be in the parlor, over the piano."

"A church window in mamma's parlor! Oh, won't that be funny! I'm going right out to tell Billy Woolsey," cried Weezy, her little tempest quite blown over. "Please, Molly, give me a raisin for Billy?"

Weezy and her brother had now been several days in Drummond, and Kirke, on Molly's pony, had scoured the village pretty thoroughly, back streets and all, from the parsonage to the stone watering-trough by Squire Twaddle's office. With his grandma's consent he had visited even the jail, bringing home to Molly a dark picture of the wretched horse-thief, stealing on toward eighty.

Kirke talked a great deal every day to his sister, and he also talked a great deal to his grandma about her, — privately admit-

ting that she looked much better than when she left Gallatin.

"And Molly does n't blaze up at the least thing, as she used to," confided he to his grandma this morning. "I don't see what 's become of her sharp temper, when she has n't lost her hair, and it 's as red as ever!"

"Molly has tried hard to learn self-control, and grandpa and I think she deserves great credit," said Grandma Rowe, gratified that Kirke should have observed the gradual improvement in his sister's character.

It was while Kirke and his grandma were yet talking, that Squire Twaddle came for Toodles. Kirke always insisted that the wise puss divined the Squire's errand; but be that as it may, she abruptly disappeared. After a vain search for her, Grandpa Rowe said to Squire Twaddle, "Pray give yourself no further trouble, my friend. My grandson will carry the cat to your office as soon as she is found.

You 'll go with pleasure, Kirke, will you not?"

Kirke amiably assented.

"I dare say you 've seen this grandson upon some of his former visits, Squire Twaddle," continued Grandpa Rowe, following his guest to the door, at which stood Molly and Weezy. "He is my son Edward's boy, and this is Louise, Edward's younger daughter. Molly, the elder, you 've already met."

"Yes; Molly and the boy look like their father," returned the Squire, carelessly; "but this little tot," — he stopped upon the threshold and gave a long, cold stare at Weezy, — "this little tot does n't resemble any of your family. I think she must look like the other side of the house."

Weezy's eyes flashed; she did not speak one word, but she darted away, and, like Toodles, disappeared from sight. Long after Squire Twaddle had gone, Molly found her in

the closet of the Snowball Room, sobbing bitterly.

"Why, Weezy, dear, precious little sister," cried she, gathering her in her arms, "what is it? Are you homesick?"

Weezy only sobbed the faster.

"Are you in pain, dearie? Tell sister where you feel bad."

"I don't feel bad; it's because I look bad, Molly. Oh, oh! I'm crying 'cause I look so bad," wailed the child, dashing the tears right and left. "He said, — the Twaddle man did, he said, — 'that little tot looks like the back side of the house.' And he meant me, Molly Rowe; you know he meant me."

"No, no, Weezy; not the *back* side of the house; you did n't understand him," exclaimed Molly, shaking with laughter. "He only said you looked like the *other* side of the house. He meant mamma's side, you know."

"Well, that 's 'most not any different," moaned

Weezy, unconsoled. "Oh, I don't want to look like any side of a house. Oh, I don't, I don't, I don't! Wish I could go home. I haven't anything but a grandpa and grandma and a sister and a brother here. I haven't any papa and mamma at all!"

The absurd little girl by this time had worked herself into such a state of despair that it was beyond Molly's power to comfort her. It took Grandpa and Grandma Rowe, both of them, with a great deal of talking, to convince her that Squire Twaddle had simply meant that she must look like her mother's family.

Meanwhile, Kirke, deserted by the other members of the household, had wandered out to the melon-patch beside the highway. He was strolling among the rusty vines, counting the ripening melons, when he saw Jerry Steele, with a hoe upon his shoulder, ambling slowly along on Mr. Carr's gray horse. Kirke

knew the horse at once, for he had seen it only that morning in the jailer's yard.

"Going to dig Mr. Carr's potatoes over yonder, Mr. Steele?" cried he, sociably, wishing to make the most of this rare opportunity to chat with a jail-bird.

Jerry nodded feebly, as if even that effort wearied him, and at a snail's pace disappeared around the bend of the road. Having heard so much lately about the thief's freedom of movement, Kirke had felt no surprise on seeing him, and he was beginning to count the melons anew, when Mr. Carr rode furiously up the hill.

"Boy, have you seen Jerry Steele?" he cried, in great excitement, when he drew near Kirke.

"Yes sir, yes sir, I have," said Kirke, habitually impatient to tell all he knew. "He rode by here a little while ago on your horse."

"He did, did he? Then why the mischief didn't you catch him, or sing out? Suppose I'd set a thief on horseback?" growled the exasperated jailer, spurring on.

Molly, at her chamber window, had heard every word.

"Oh, how could Kirke be so stupid? Oh, I'm so ashamed," thought she, seizing her hat, and rushing wildly downstairs. "Jerry Steele sha'n't get away if I can help it. I'll catch him for Mr. Carr myself!"

The pony, saddled for her accustomed morning ride, stood at the hitching-post. With frantic haste Molly leaped upon his back, and shouting to Kirke to follow, went tearing up the hill. Mr. Carr, mounted on the blacksmith's swift trotter, was almost out of sight; but Molly, without any very clear idea of what she meant to do, speeded on. Behind her came old Dobbin, ridden by John Hodges, and still farther behind, two wagons, and a crowd of

men and boys on foot. By this time nearly everybody in the village knew that Jerry Steele was at large. Molly's only thought was that he must not escape through the fault of her brother.

On rushed the trotter, on bounded the pony, on lumbered old Dobbin, for two long miles. Then suddenly Mr. Carr drew his bridle-rein, and sprang to the ground. He had come upon his own gray horse tied by the roadside.

"Do you see him, Mr. Carr, — do you see Jerry Steele?" cried Molly excitedly, reaching the spot as the jailer leaped the fence.

"Not yet; but I shall find him in a minute," said Mr. Carr, hopefully striding into the thin woods skirting the highway.

He thought that crippled old Jerry, failing in strength, had hidden among the fallen leaves, and could be taken out of them as easily as plums could be picked from a pudding.

"Oh, Kirke, Kirke, Jerry Steele is the same

as caught!" cried Molly joyfully, riding up to her brother, now springing from the forward wagon.

"Oh, I 'm so glad! I never could have looked Mr. Carr in the face again if Jerry had run off," cried Kirke, dashing on; while Molly, suddenly conscious that it was not quite nice to be the only little girl in the rapidly increasing crowd, turned Shelto's head toward home, and cantered back to the parsonage.

CHAPTER XII.

RINGING THE BELL.

In the yard Molly met Grandpa Rowe and John Hodges with the carryall, and in the front hall Mrs. Filura with the scrubbing-brush.

"Your grandsir has been sent for to a funeral, Miss Molly," said she with unwonted smiles. "He'll be gone two days; and if I don't give his study one good sousing meanwhilst, why I miss my guess."

After Mr. Hodges' return from taking Grandpa Rowe to the station he was called in to move the bookcases; grandma herself dusted the papers and sermons, while Mrs. Filura beat mats and scoured paint as if she were dealing with mortal foes. As for Molly, she saved her grandma's steps, and in watching for Kirke wasted a great many of her own.

"Where was Jerry Steele, Kirke? Oh, I hope 't was you that found him!" shouted she, running out to meet her brother the moment he appeared.

"Found him! Nobody's found the fellow. I found his hoe, that's all," muttered Kirke, weary, depressed, and half famished. "Mr. Carr thinks now, that Jerry must have thrown the hoe among the leaves on purpose to blind us."

"Oh, Kirke, I'm so disappointed!"

"Mr. Carr says Jerry probably had somebody waiting for him with a carriage near the wood, and while we've been scratching about the underbrush, the old thief has skipped, nobody knows where. Oh, Molly, I'm so mortified to think how I let him go by me, I could howl!"

"So could I," said Molly, feeling that she had no comfort to offer.

"Grandma is always saying what a beauti-

ful world this is," continued Kirke, dragging himself up the steps with an air of intense disgust. "I don't see it. Now just you think, Molly. Here's Jerry Steele run away, and here's the jailer blaming me for it like sixty; and — and — here's Toodles come back with a red eye," he ended rather lamely, as the cat rubbed against his tired feet. "It's a pesky world, I say; and if you should give me a map of it this precious minute I would n't look at it."

But a hearty supper and a good night's rest somewhat brightened Kirke's views of life; and when, late in the forenoon, he left Toodles and her kittens at Squire Twaddle's office, he had become moderately cheerful.

"If we hurry, Kirke, we can get back to the church by the time Mr. John has finished ringing the bell," said Molly, as Kirke climbed into the wagon in which she and Weezy had been waiting.

"That's a bright idea; we'll take him home with us," responded Kirke, turning the wagon with a flourish.

John Hodges rushed out to them from the vestibule in a state of unusual tumult, having that moment received an urgent despatch from Mr. Carr, requesting him to drive without delay to Rushville, where there were reasons for suspecting Jerry Steele to be concealed.

"Mr. Carr can't get home himself till about nine o'clock this evening, so he wants me to do the business for him," said Mr. Hodges, springing into the wagon as he closed his hurried recital; "but it's sending me off in short metre. I declare for 't, I don't see how I can manage to leave."

"Oh, you must go, Mr. John. You must go!" cried Molly, clasping her hands. "Oh, if you only *can* bring back Jerry Steele!"

"Yes, yes, of course you must go," cried

Kirke with equal impatience; "I'll fodder the cattle, and —"

"Amos Sprague, he brought me the word, and he's come forrud and offered to do the milking and the chores," broke in John Hodges, thinking aloud; "but he won't be pestered with ringing the bell; and I can't blame him, living t' other side of the hill as he does, and clean away from the meetin'-house."

"We 'll ring the bell, — Kirke and I; oh, won't we Kirke?" cried Molly, nearly falling over the wheel in her eagerness. "Mr. John, you know we can ring it. Did n't you say we could, yourself?"

"I guess you little creeturs would find it kind o' pokerish doin's come night-time," said Mr. Hodges, shaking his head and the whip at the same time. "No, I should n't feel like settin' you at it, 'specially with your grandsir gone. I don't see but I 've got to wait round till I can look up somebody."

"Oh, no, no, Mr. John! Don't wait a minute!" urged Molly as they jolted into the yard. "Jerry Steele may be getting away from Rushville this minute."

Grandma Rowe also entreated John Hodges to start at once. In regard to the bell she said she knew some arrangement could be made before night. So only pausing to say good-by to his wife, ill in bed from a sick headache caused by yesterday's labors, Mr. Hodges took a couple of turnovers to eat on the way, and set forth.

Wretched Mrs. Filura had a hard afternoon, as had Grandma Rowe and Molly. At her grandmother's bidding Molly ran up stairs and down with mustard and water, hot vinegar, and hop pillows; and when visitors came and grandma went down to receive them, she herself waited upon Mrs. Filura.

With so much to attend to, it was not strange that Grandma Rowe forgot about the ringing

of the bell till after Amos Sprague had gone home for the night. She then was reminded by seeing Molly light the lantern.

"Why, Molly, I never meant to let you children ring the bell; it does n't seem the proper thing," said she, much disturbed.

"Oh grandma, don't you worry! We like to do it; we think it 's larks!" cried Kirke, swinging around three times and catching her in his arms.

"I ought to have sent for somebody," continued grandma, her short flaxen curls yet quivering from his embrace; "but it 's too late now. Be very careful of the light, dears, won't you? Don't set the church on fire."

"Oh yes, yes, grandma, we 'll be very, very careful," said Molly, taking the key from its nail in the side entry, and following Kirke out through the porch door.

The children ran gayly down the hill, and at its foot nearly stumbled over a moving black

object, that proved to be Toodles with one of her kittens in her mouth.

"Why, Toodles! How did you find your way here? Three cheers for old Toodles!" cried Kirke, swinging his lantern.

But Molly hurried him on to the church. There his spirits suddenly flagged. Molly, too, felt very quiet as she unlocked that great outer door and stole softly into the vestibule. Within it was strangely still, with no more air stirring than might have been wafted by the wing of a moth. Unconsciously the children began to speak in whispers.

"The very minute the clock sets out to strike nine we 'll pull the rope," said Molly, shivering. "We must both pull at once, you know."

"Yes, I know, pull like everything," said Kirke, cramming his hands into his pockets to conceal their trembling. "But 't is n't time to ring the bell. 'T is n't nine o'clock yet.

I don't believe it can be more than five minutes of."

"Hark, Kirke, did you hear anything?" cried Molly, grasping her brother's elbow.

"Yes, Molly; did n't you?"

"Hush!"

"It sounded back in the big room," whispered Kirke, listening with all his ears.

"Hark, I heard it again," exclaimed Molly, as white as the plastered wall behind her. "It is, it certainly is — inside."

"Look there!" whispered Kirke, pointing tremulously towards the great door leading from the vestibule into the main body of the building. "I thought I saw it move!"

This door was seldom fastened, but as the children were aware, John Hodges habitually left the key in the lock. It was to-night in its usual place. They could see it gleam in the uncertain light.

"I don't see the door move," said Molly,

after a moment of suspense. "You must have fancied it. But let's turn the key. I'll dare if you dare."

"Hoh, hoh, hoh! Hoh, hoh, hoh!"

Surely this was no fancy. There came the same peculiar ringing sound again, now more distinct than before. The children felt that it was no longer a question of keys, and hastily retreated toward the door by which they had entered.

"Hoh, hoh, hoh! Hoh, hoh, hoh!" The strange ghostly knell pursued them. Kirke clutched Molly, Molly clutched the lantern, and both sprang across the threshold. "Hoh, hoh, hoh!" Midway in her flight Molly stopped short. Where, oh where had she recently heard that sound? What, oh what was it? It came to her in a flash. It was, yes, — she could not be mistaken, — it was Jerry Steele's familiar cough!

"Oh, Kirke, Kirke!" she gasped, pulling

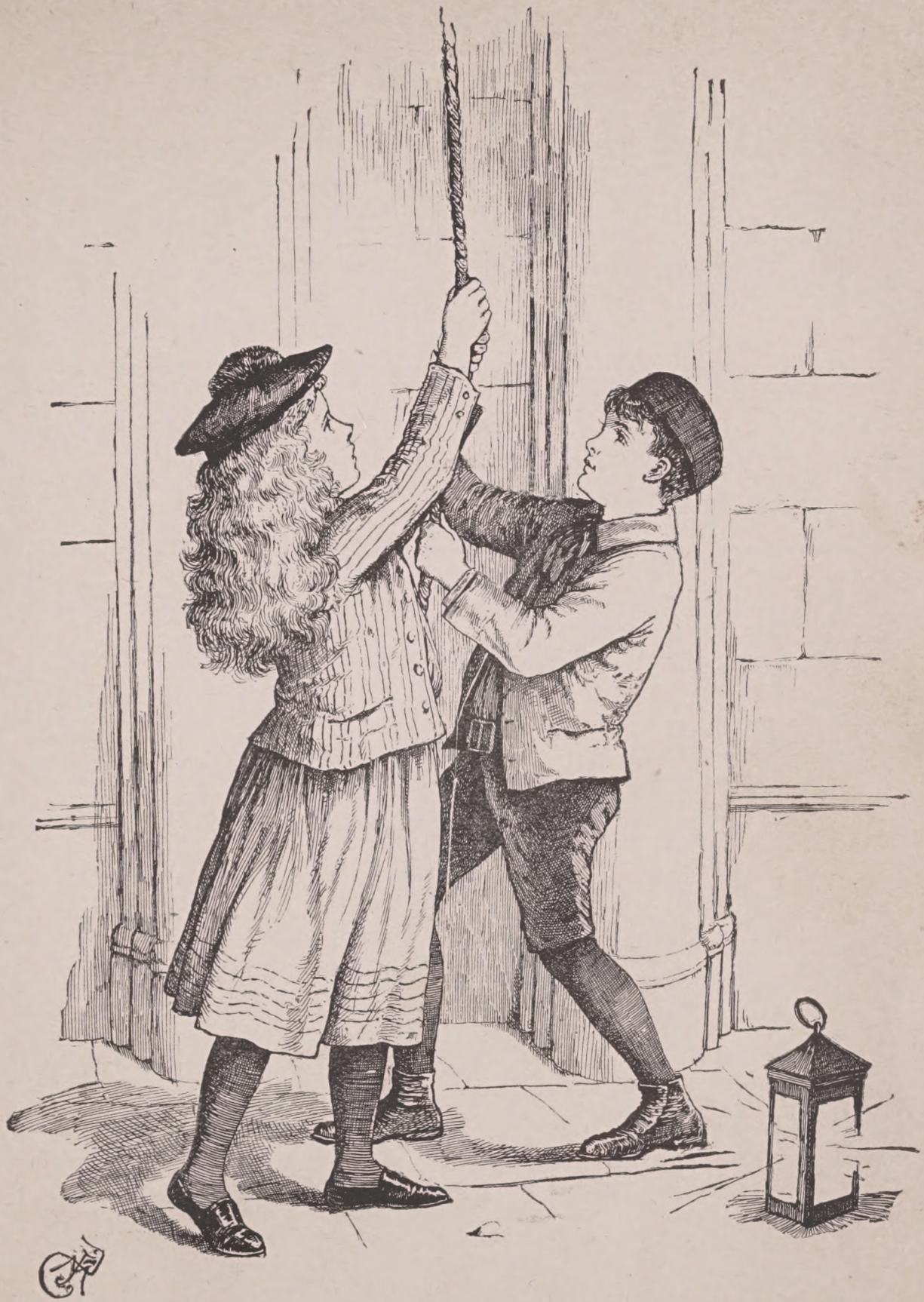
the frightened lad backward. "It 's Jerry Steele. He is n't at Rushville; he 's here in the church! He truly is. Let 's lock him in. Oh, let 's not be afraid!"

Kirke was no more afraid than Molly, for both were as frightened as they could be; but with hearts beating like trip-hammers they stole up the steps again and closed the outer door. In another moment Molly had locked it.

"Now let 's run with all our might, Kirke, to tell Mr. Carr," she cried. "Oh, hurry, hurry!"

Kirke needed no second bidding. The jail was near, and the children flew as if their feet had wings.

The tired jailer, discouraged by his fruitless quest, at first refused to credit their wild story; but after they had dragged him to the vestibule he went boldly into the church, and lured on by the noise the children had de-



MOLLY AND KIRKE RINGING THE BELL.—Page 145.

scribed, came upon Jerry Steele lying on the pulpit sofa, fast asleep. As Mr. Carr laid hands on him the church clock began to strike nine.

"Oh, the bell! we 'd almost forgotten the bell!" cried Molly, tearing down the aisle with Kirke at her heels. "We 'll ring it as if it was the Fourth of July. Mr. Carr can't blame you any more, Kirke, for letting Jerry run off, for is n't it we that have found him?"

And they did ring so fast and so loud that people rushed to the church to ask where the fire was, and thus learned, before they slept, that Jerry Steele was secured.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMPANY TO TEA.

"'WHO put him in?'" cried Little Miss Weezy.

"'Little Johnny Green,'" answered Kirke.

It was the next morning, and Weezy had only just heard of Jerry Steele's capture.

"No, no, Kirke, 'out any funning," persisted she, "who put that naughty old man into my grandpa's good church?"

"He climbed in at a back window, Weezy. Mr. Carr just now told me about it."

"But what did Jerry do with himself that day after he stopped at the wood?" asked Molly, bringing in the Johnny-cake.

"That's the joke of it," cried Kirke, setting the chairs around the table for breakfast.

"You remember the rushes, Molly, across the road from where his horse stood? He was skulking in that wet place."

"He was? I almost rode into it!"

"Of course nobody thought of looking for him in a bog; and he lay there till pitch dark, and then hobbled back to the church."

"And did n't anybody give him anything to eat, — not the teeniest speck of a doughnut?" asked Weezy.

"Oh, he helped himself to the crackers left over from the oyster-supper at the vestry, and he drank the communion wine."

"I wonder it did n't choke him," shuddered Molly, running out for the coffee-pot.

"He meant to stay in the church garret till the village people had sort of forgotten about him; but it was so cold last night he came down to thaw out, and then his cough gave him away."

"Jerry must have been worn with fatigue, or

that racking cough would have waked him," said Grandma Rowe, bringing in a saucer of warm milk-porridge. "I'm confident I heard Toodles last night every time she mewed under my window."

"Poor grandma! And Toodles mewed as often as she brought home a kitten. That was six times," cried Molly, hurrying back.

"Poor Toodles! I should say," said grandma, stroking the cat. "She must have journeyed at least a dozen miles since yesterday evening. We'll never send her from home again."

After breakfast Molly proposed making some gruel for Mrs. Filura.

"That's a happy thought, my dear," said Grandma Rowe. "Filura is so much better now, I think she could enjoy it."

"You're not afraid of my troubling her, grandma, by carrying it to her?"

"Oh no. Filura said yesterday she liked to see you about; you were so quiet and helpful."

"Oh, did she say that, grandma, — did she really?" said Molly, with tears in her eyes. She had tried hard to be kind to Mrs. Filura, and keep out of her way, but she had not supposed Mrs. Filura observed it.

"Yes, dear, I know Filura is grateful for all you've done, and I've meant to speak of this to you before. Filura seldom expresses her feelings. She's queer about that!"

"Oh, I'll never mind any more how queer she is, now I know she's willing to have me around," mused Molly, wonderfully cheered by her grandma's words.

The consciousness that Kirke was no longer blamed for letting Jerry Steele escape, and that she herself was really liked by Mrs. Filura, made the ensuing November days very pleasant ones to Molly. They speeded by on wings, till at last came the day before Thanksgiving.

Molly was busy all the morning helping Grandma Rowe, who expected two or three

people, "friends of grandpa," on the afternoon train. Molly fancied it was a minister and his family, though she had taken no pains to inquire. By afternoon everything was ready for the company, — everything but Mrs. Filura's quince jelly, still simmering upon the kitchen stove, and the cream-of-tartar biscuits to be made at supper-time. Grandpa and grandma were preparing to go to the station to bring home the guests, and they were to take Weezy with them.

"We shall try to get back by six o'clock, Filura," said grandma, coming out into the kitchen, her silver-gray bonnet on. "Be sure to have supper ready. We shall all be hungry."

"How many, many things you 've cooked, grandma!" cried Molly, peeping for about the sixth time at the tempting array of pies, custards, and cakes, in the pantry. "I hope these people will have good appetites."

"I hope so too, Molly," said grandma, with a quiet smile. "I'm very fond of these people."

After grandma and the others had gone away in the carryall, Molly, wrapped in a shawl, climbed up into the seat in the cherry-tree to read. Though so late in the season the day was mild, and so clear that from her perch Molly could distinctly see Kirke and John Hodges with the oxen crossing the distant bridge. Having watched them out of sight, she opened her book. She was beginning the second chapter, when, interrupted by a wail from the kitchen, she sprang down to see what was the matter.

"Matter, Miss Molly? The matter is that I'm a nateral-born fool," cried Mrs. Filura, striding frantically about the kitchen, tending her right hand as if it had been a fractious baby. "I've upset that quince jelly onto my hand and scalt it most tremenjously; and here's

John gone, and your grandsir and grandma, and wuss 'n all, that company coming to tea! For the good land, what *be* I going to do?"

"Oh, I 'm so sorry, Mrs. Filura! Oh, it 's dreadful!" groaned Molly, wringing her own hands from sympathy. "Sha' n't I go for Dr. Blake?"

"Go for the doctor? Senses, no! I 've put on soft soap, and that 's as much as I can stand now, let alone a doctor!"

"Oh, I wish I could do something for you, Mrs. Filura! Is n't there anything that I can do?"

"Yes, you can clean up that mess if you 've a mind to," answered Mrs. Filura, with a tragic wave of her burned hand toward the sticky pool smoking upon the range and rapidly spreading over the floor.

Molly looked glum. She had not expected this. Though honest in her desire to help Mrs. Filura, she had not thought of helping

her in this way. She had wished to soothe her pain, not to scrub her kitchen. She had never offered to "clean up that mess." Besides, Mrs. Filura was so cross! Molly remembered with regret the interesting story thrown aside, and was strongly tempted to run back to the tree to finish it; and then she also remembered something her grandfather had read from the Bible that morning, and she decided to stay. The words were these: "Do all things without murmurings or disputings."

"I will. I won't murmur. I won't murmur a bit," mused she virtuously, as she tied an apron over her pretty cashmere dress, and kneeled to stop the advancing tide of syrup. "I'll do all I can for Mrs. Filura, I pity her so." But as her fingers grew sticky, and her arm grew tired, she couldn't help adding to herself, "I should think Mrs. Filura might as much as say 'please' to me, though! Yes, I should, if her burn *does* smart!"

Mrs. Filura had sunk into a chair, and was leaning her head against the table.

"I feel kind o' faint, Miss Molly," she said in a weak voice. "If you 'll be so good, I guess I shall have to ask you to get me to bed before I keel over."

"If you 'll be so good." This little clause made all the difference in the world! Molly's resentment vanished, and she sprang eagerly to bring a glass of water. Afterward she flew upstairs for the phial of smelling-salts, and she ended by dressing Mrs. Filura's burn with glycerine and cotton.

"Mamma put it on Kirke's wrist last Fourth of July, when he scorched it with India crackers," said she, wrapping the hand as carefully as she could. "Do I hurt you awfully?"

"No more 'n you can't help," replied Mrs. Filura, flinching. "Now I 'll go and lay down a spell. By and by I guess I can manage to set the table with my left hand; but the

folks won't get no biscuit for supper. They'll have to make out with crackers."

"I'll set the table; I'd like to do it," cried Molly, following Mrs. Filura upstairs. "Don't get up till grandma comes. Please don't."

"I'll be round to oversee you,—if I can," gasped Mrs. Filura, struggling with returning faintness. "You know where to find the tarts, Miss Molly, and the chicken is in the screen cupboard."

As soon as Mrs. Filura had thrown herself upon the bed, Molly hastily closed the door and rushed downstairs with a new idea. She would make the biscuits herself,—she, Molly Rowe! Had she not at school learned how to make biscuits?

"Of course grandma would be mortified to have crackers for company," thought she; "and she said Mrs. Filura must have supper all ready at six o'clock."

It was now nearly five. Molly put more

wood in the stove, and in doing it slipped in the pool of jelly. Plainly, that must be removed before anything else could be attempted; so she scraped and scrubbed, and scrubbed and scraped, till the stove and floor were clean. Then stealing upstairs she found to her joy that Mrs. Filura, exhausted from pain, had fallen asleep.

"Oh, if she only won't wake till supper is ready!" said Molly to herself, stealing into the Snowball Room for her manicure set. "I don't want her to oversee me. I want to get supper all myself."

Having cleaned her nails, and put on a clean white cap and apron, she hastened down to the pantry.

"Let me see," said she aloud. "One quart of sifted flour. Where *does* Mrs. Filura keep her sieve? Oh, here behind the door. Two heaping teaspoonfuls of cream of tartar and an even teaspoonful of salt, mixed with the flour.

Well, I've done that. One large spoonful of drippings, or butter, rubbed into the flour with the tips of the fingers. Here she goes! Now, one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in the milk. Oh, bother, the milk is n't skimmed! Never mind, I 'll skim the cream into the china pitcher for tea."

A few minutes later Molly's biscuits were in the oven.

"Rising like everything, true's you live!" said she, opening the oven door as soon as she dared. "Oh, if they're only good enough for the company, won't grandma be glad!" It was quarter of six; there was no time to waste. Molly frisked off to the dining-room to set the table, and when the carryall drove up, she had supper ready, — including the tea.

Mrs. Filura, awakened by the rattling of wheels, hurried down to the dining-room in a great flutter. "Oh, mercy me, how could I have slept so long!" thought she; "and here's

the folks right here! I must see what that child has been up to, and straighten things out as quick as I can!"

Molly, with a great blotch of flour on one cheek, was proudly bringing in the plate of biscuits. Mrs. Filura's practised eye saw their lightness at a glance, and that nothing was lacking from the table.

"You 've managed complete, Miss Molly. You 've got a noble supper!" exclaimed she, with a sigh of relief. Then as she brushed away the flour she actually patted Molly's cheek, — with the well hand of course, — and added, "You 've done me a good turn, Miss Molly, and I sha' n't forget it in you!"

As Molly, still holding the biscuits, stood smiling and blushing, hardly able to believe her ears, the door opened, and then she could hardly believe her eyes, for in walked her papa and mamma.

"And I knew it all the time!" cried Kirke,

rushing in behind them. "I mean, I've known it ever since morning; and you'll never say again I could n't keep a secret."

"Oh, it's too good to be true!" said Molly, with both arms about her mother's neck. "I was thinking just two minutes ago how happy I was; but now I'm the happiest girl in the world!"

THE END.

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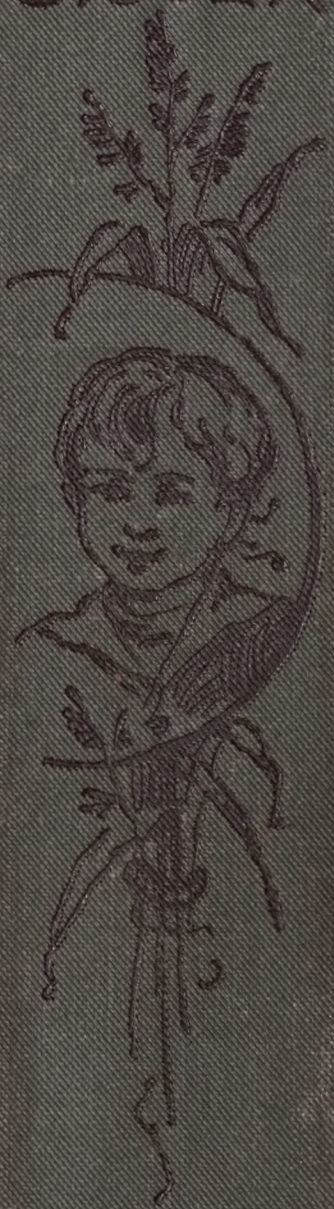
LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S SISTER



BOSTON

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